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Election-Reaction (Opposition) (Roundup)

DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT NOT SURPRISING - OPPOSITION

KUALA LUMPUR, March 3 (Bernama) -- Opposition parties have described the dissolution of Parliament tomorrow as not surprising, in fact, it is something that they have been waiting for.

PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang said the party was ready to face the general election at any time as it had made preparation since last year.

"The rumour about the general election had been going round since last year when Tun Dr Mahathir (Mohamad) was Prime Minister. We have made preparation since then and we are not surprised, it (the dissolution of Parliament) is a normal development," he told reporters after chairing the State Exco meeting in Kuala Terengganu today.

Abdul Hadi, who is also Terengganu Menteri Besar, was commenting on the statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today that Parliament would be dissolved tomorrow to enable the 11th general election to be held.

Abdullah said the Yang di-Pertuan Agong had signed the declaration for the dissolution of Parliament today.

Abdul Hadi said with the thorough preparation by the party machinery since last year and the close cooperation with Keadilan, both political parties were 100 per cent ready to face Barisan Nasional (BN) in the coming general election.

"We will work together with Keadilan in the poll this time. Last week, we discussed seat allocation...we have also prepared a draft manifesto which can be printed any time now," he said.

From the discussions held, he said PAS would get additional seats in several states and so would Keadilan.

"In Terengganu, insya-Allah an additional Parliamentary seat for Keadilan," he said.

In the 1999 general election, Keadilan was allocated a

Parliamentary seat (Kemaman). Terengganu Keadilan chairman, Abdul Rahman Yusof defeated BN candidate Datuk Wan Zaki Muda in that election.

On PAS preparations in Terengganu, Abdul Hadi said the party machinery was in "total readiness" for the poll this time compared to the previous one.

He said the party would issue separate manifestos in certain states besides the one for the national level.

When asked which constituency he would be contesting in, Abdul Hadi said he was prepared to contest in any constituency decided by the party.

"(But) due to pressure from the supporters, I have been asked to contest in Terengganu in my present constituency," said Abdul Hadi, who is the Member of Parliament for Marang and State Assemblyman for Rhu Redang.

Abdul Hadi expressed confidence that PAS would continue to lead the Terengganu government after the general election.

Meanwhile in Kuala Lumpur, Democratic Action Party (DAP) Secretary-General Kerk Kim Hock said, the announcement came as no surprise since everyone has been waiting for the day.

DAP had been gearing up and getting ready for the upcoming general election and would be finalising its candidate list soon, he told Bernama here today.

He said DAP would also be meeting up with Keadilan this Saturday to discuss the coming election.

Kerk hoped that Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who would be carrying out his first general election as Prime Minister, would ensure it was a fair and clean election without misuse and abuse of power by the caretaker government.

He also hoped the Election Commission (EC) would play its role in ensuring the "first electoral battle for the 21st Century" was free, clean and fair.

"The first step by EC is to ensure the campaigning period is not less than 14 days, although DAP would prefer the campaigning period to be 21

days," he said.

In the 1999 general election, the DAP contested in 47 Parliamentary and 88 State seats but only managed to win 10 and 11 seats respectively.

The Malaysian Democratic Party (MDP), meanwhile, hoped that there would be longer campaigning period for the upcoming 11th general election.

MDP secretary-general Wee Choo Keong said that the Election Commission should provide a minimum of three weeks or a maximum of one month campaigning period.

"Dissolution is not the problem...but I hope (there is) more time for campaigning," he told Bernama over the phone when asked about his reaction to the dissolution of Parliament tomorrow and his party's preparations to face the election.

"What concerns me if it (the campaigning period) is too short...unfair for the opposition as they don't have (enough) machinery and publicity," he said.

The MDP was formed in 1999 and had contested several state and Parliament seats in the 1999 general election but failed to win any.

Replying to a question, Wee said the party would contest Parliamentary and state seats in Selangor, Perak, Penang and Kuala Lumpur.

"We will be realistic...not concentrating on too many seats as we have limited resources," he said.

However Wee said, the MDP had yet to decide on the number of seats to be contested by the party.

"We will meet tonight or tomorrow and then we will decide how many seats," he said.

Wee also said that so far MDP did not receive any invitation from other opposition parties to cooperate in the election.

"So far no calls for meeting...We presume they (other opposition parties) are not interested, however we will go ahead," said Wee.

Meanwhile, Keadilan deputy president Abdul Rahman Othman said the party was ready for the general election.

"Basically, Keadilan is not in a state of panic (to face the general election). In terms of preparations, almost 100 per cent ready. For the rest of it, we still have time for final preparation until the nomination day is announced, he told Bernama.

In terms of candidates, he said only the best candidates would be fielded in the constituencies Keadilan would be contesting.

"Seventy per cent of the candidates are old faces while the rest will be new ones. The candidates will be selected based on their credibility, leadership and integrity as leaders. Most of the new faces are professionals," he said.

As for the party's election strategy, Abdul Rahman said focus would be given to Selangor, Perak and Penang.

"In the other states where Keadilan is not contesting, we will still give our support and assistance to ensure victory for the opposition party," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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