

05 MAR 2004
Election-Dates (UPDATE 1)
POLLING DAY ON MARCH 21

PUTRAJAYA, March 5 (Bernama) -- Some 10.3 million Malaysians who are eligible to vote will go to the polls in the country's 11th general election on March 21, the Election Commission (EC) announced today.

EC chairman Tan Sri Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman said that nomination day in the general election had been fixed for March 13.

At stake in the election are 219 parliamentary seats and 505 state seats in all the states except Sarawak which held its state election in 2001 and the term of the state government will only expire in 2006.

Abdul Rashid's announcement at a media conference held at the EC headquarters here at 11.35 am was telecast live over RTM and TV3.

According to Abdul Rashid, the election writs would be issued tomorrow while the notices would be issued the following day.

The 10th parliament was officially dissolved yesterday, nine months earlier than the expiry of its five-year term to pave way for the general election.

Abdul Rashid said that 27 political parties registered with the EC would be contesting in the general election.

All the states except Sarawak have also officially dissolved their respective state legislatures to allow for the state elections to be conducted simultaneously in the general election.

The 2003 master electoral roll with 10,284,591 voters gazetted last Wednesday will be used in the general election. The electoral roll was verified as up to Dec 31 last year.

It contained the names of 200,712 postal voters.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman, is seeking a fresh mandate after taking over the premiership from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Oct 31 last year.

Abdul Rashid said that 219 nomination centres would be opened nationwide from 9 am to 10 am on March 13. The objection period is from 10 am and 11 am.

He said that some 6,000 schools would serve as polling centres where voters could cast their votes from 8 am to 5 pm.

The EC chairman said that several factors had been taken into account in deciding the campaign period like the preparedness of the EC itself in conducting the election, the capacity of the security forces in ensuring public order and the need for the elected government to function as soon as possible in the country.

"The period of uncertainty should not be prolonged and the EC felt responsible in ensuring that this does not occur," he said.

Asked to comment on claims that the campaign period was too short, he said that the people already had a good knowledge of the political parties in the country and regarded the period allotted as adequate.

In fact, he said, over the past four years, permits had been issued for 11,692 'ceramah' or political party activities.

To a question, he said nobody would be disqualified on technicalities.

Any disqualification, he said, would probably come prior to the submission of their nomination forms due to the qualification of would-be candidates.

Abdul Rashid said the bulk of the election results could be expected at around 10 pm.

He also estimated a voter turnout of between 80 and 90 per cent based on the conducive environment in the country and the fact that the people were "already impatient to discharge their responsibility".

The EC had tried its best to "clean up" the electoral roll, he said.

Abdul Rashid said that independent candidates could pick symbols from the list of 20 to be provided by the EC for submitting their nomination papers.

On security aspects, he said that the Election Campaign Enforcement Team would ensure that the campaign period proceed without incidents and in the event of any disturbance, the police would assist in ensuring public order.

"Any breach in security not related to the conduct of the election will come under the jurisdiction of the police," he said.

Abdul Rashid said that the EC hoped for the full cooperation of

the
political parties and their supporters.

"I know there are people who want to see trouble. We should be able to conduct the election smoothly if the political parties and their supporters extend their cooperation by not contravening the law.

"Let's allow the voters to make their own decision in a calm atmosphere for the future of the nation," he said.

The EC chairman also said that it had only taken into account the interest of the nation in deciding the election dates and the Formula 1 event in Sepang from March 19 to 21 was not a factor against holding the polls on the fixed date.

In the 1999 general election, the BN won 148 of the 193 parliamentary seats it contested but the number of seats increased to 152 following the move by the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) to rejoin the BN in January 2002 and the BN win in the Pendang by-election in July the same year.

The BN won 281 of the 394 state seats it contested but the ruling coalition lost the Lunas state seat to Keadilan in a by-election in November 2000.

As at the dissolution of parliament yesterday, the BN held 152 parliamentary seats and 280 state seats.

The main opposition party, PAS, held 26 parliamentary seats and 98 state seats, the DAP held 10 parliamentary seats and 11 state seats and Keadilan held five parliamentary seats and five state seats.

Following the redelineation of the electoral boundaries conducted by the EC last year and the creation of the new Putrajaya parliamentary constituency, there is now an additional of 26 parliamentary seats.

The redelineation exercise also created 63 new state seats, bringing the total to 505.

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