

06/03/2004

All set for eagerly awaited election

AFTER all the waiting and speculating, the general election has at last been fixed for Sunday, March 21, with nomination day on March 13, which is next Saturday. It will be a historic occasion. Prime Minister and Barisan Nasional chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will be seeking a mandate from the people to lead the country into a clearly defined future. The 11th general election will be one of the most pacific, offering voters a choice between distinct alternatives. Since taking over from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Abdullah has created a wellspring of goodwill from the rakyat. He takes the nation to the polls with the wounds of 1999 largely healed.

Between March 13 and 21, only a period of over a week has been slotted for campaigning. Too short a time, some may say, especially in the Opposition. But "election fever" has been building over the last few months and political parties have been actively campaigning in various forms. Election Commission chairman Tan Sri Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman said that over the last four years, permits had been issued for 11,692 ceramah and other political party activities. There has been plenty of time and opportunity for politicians to get their message across.

By now, even first-time voters will be familiar with the main political parties. They will also have more than an inkling of what the Barisan Nasional stands for, and what separates it from the Opposition. If some of them still don't know, they needn't worry. They will soon be deluged with a flood of information - stump speeches, pamphlets, billboards, house-to-house visits, and anything else that will attract their support, and win their all-important votes. As for the older electorate, having gone through it all before, they know what it's all about.

Quite a sizeable number would have already made up their minds. Some are diehard supporters of a particular party. Nothing, it seems, will change their stand. Others are undecided. They remain to be swayed by what they see and hear during the campaign. But the people must always remember that their votes will decide what kind of Malaysia they'll get. Their right to choose must not be exercised on a whim. They must think carefully before making their choices and not let their hearts rule their heads.