

## **July 24 fixed for Kuala Besut by-election**

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**By Koh Jun Lin**

Polling for the Kuala Besut by-election has been fixed for July 24, which is a Wednesday.

The nomination day is July 12, a Friday, a state holiday.

Announcing this today, the Election Commission (EC) also said that advanced polling will be held on July 20, a Saturday.

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This provides for a 12-day campaign period, which means that the whole whole polls affair takes place during the fasting month of Ramadan.

The by-election follows the death of the incumbent assemblyperson Dr A Rahman Mokhtar on June 26, paving the way for Malaysia's first by-election since the 13th general election just two months ago.

He said the campaigning has already started on the day after Rahman passed away.

"We don't want to prolong this (unofficial campaigning). The longer we delay the date of the by-election, the longer the campaign during the fasting month. We have discussed this issue and decided to do it early," he said.

For this year, Ramadan starts on July 9, and is expected to end on Aug 7 with Hari Raya Aidilfitri the next day.

On Communications Minister Ahmad Shabery Cheek's proposal for RTM to go for live broadcast of the vote-counting process, Abdul Aziz replied in the negative.

He said the EC feels that this is unnecessary because the election candidates' agents would be present at the counting centres.

And also that the EC feels that it would not be able to turn down requests from other broadcasters to follow suit if it allows RTM to record the process, he added.

He pointed out that allowing RTM to cover the counting process would mean

opening the doors to other TV stations as the EC cannot prevent others from applying for the same privilege, too.

"The EC is an independent body and we have to also consider other applications," he said.

If there is to be any recording, he said it should be done by the EC and not a third party.

However, the commission is prepared to discuss the matter further with the government for future elections, he added.

For the Kuala Besut polls, Abdul Aziz said the electoral roll up to June 26 would be used, involving 16,534 normal voters, 1,134 military personnel and spouses, 14 police personnel, and one overseas absentee voter, spread over nine polling stations.

He said those living abroad eligible for postal voting have until nomination day to apply to do so, while for media and electoral workers, the deadline July 14.

The by-election will be managed by Besut district land office officer A Rahim Jusoh as returning officer.

He will be assisted by three assistant returning officers and 305 election workers at an estimated cost of RM760,000.

No international observers at polls

No international observers will be present at the by-election.

However, two NGOs, Majlis Belia Malaysia (MBM) and Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas) have been invited to do so, he said.

When asked about the possibility of a hung state assembly in the event Pakatan Rakyat wins, Abdul Aziz admitted this issue was overlooked during the last re-delineation exercise.

He said the EC would ensure that state assemblies and parliament would have an odd number of seats with this year's re-delineation exercise.

The commission is powerless to resolve a hung parliament, it is up to politicians to resolve any deadlock, he said.

If that fails, he added, the sultan may intervene, and failure will mean calling for a state election.

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