

Galas by-election set for Nov 4, nomination on Oct 26
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The Election Commission (EC) today set Nov 4 as polling day for the Galas by-election, as the nation witnesses its 12th by-election since the watershed March 2008 general elections. EC deputy chairperson Wan Ahmad Wan Omar said they have set Oct 26 for nominations in the Kelantan state seat, which fell vacant after PAS assemblyperson Che Hashim Sulaima died of cancer on Sept 27.

Wan Ahmad said the nominations will be done at the Gua Musang Land and Survey Department while the Gua Musang Civic Centre will be used as the central counting centre on polling day.

He said the electoral rolls have been updated as at Sept 27 this year, with a total of 11,553 voters including 127 postal voters.

“We have voters as young as 21 and some over 100 years old. The oldest registered voter in Galas is 111 years old,” Wan Ahmad said at a press conference to announce the by-election date at the EC office in Putrajaya today.

The racial make-up of the Galas state constituency has changed little based on the updated rolls, with Malays commanding a 61.63 percent majority with 7,125 registered.

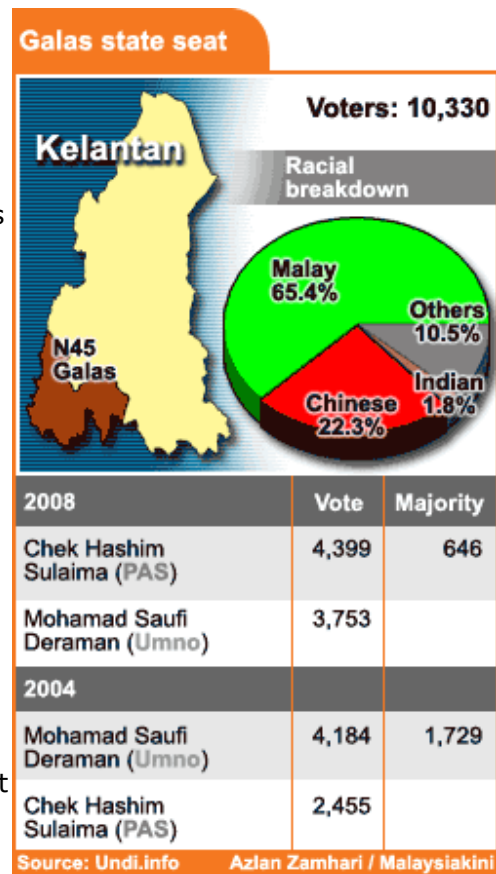
The Chinese comprise 20.08 percent or 2,317 voters followed by the Orang Asli, who number 1,889 voters or 16.37 percent.

The rest of the voters include 158 Indians (1.6 percent), 10 Sarawak bumiputeras (0.09 percent) and 27 of other races (0.23 percent).

Gua Musang district officer Wan Mustapha Wan Ab Hamid has been appointed as returning officer and will be assisted by Mohammad Yusoff Hassan, Mohd Helmi Mat Zin and Hasnul Hariz Ab Llah.

There will also be three election campaign enforcement teams deployed to monitor campaign activities by the contesting parties, part of a total of 323 EC officials who will be dispatched to the Kelantanese constituency.

Wan Ahmad noted that the EC estimates they will have to spend around RM1.3 million for this by-election, including for the use of a helicopter to access four out of the 13 polling stations, which include 11 schools, one hall and an Orang Asli medical station.





Good turnout expected

He said however that they expect the turnout to be good despite the polls being held on a working day, based on the turnout of around 81 percent during the March 2008 general elections.

"Many of the voters are either self-employed or practice agriculture, and based on the 12th general election turnout we do not see any reason for a dip, barring bad weather," he said.

Wan Ahmad pointed out that they have yet to decide whether or not they will appoint an independent observer for this by-election, though he hinted that it is unlikely they will appoint anyone.

Earlier the EC removed Mafrel, who were appointed as official independent observers for several past by-elections, as they had not submitted their reports as required.

Wan Ahmad pointed out that Mafrel had eventually submitted its reports and the EC will meet with them on a "suitable date" to discuss their findings, but maintained that Mafrel is still out.

"Even if we do not appoint any group, the polling agents of the candidates themselves will serve as observers because they will be inside from morning to evening.

"They are the best people to observe because they represent the interests of the parties, of the candidates, while the independent observers will still have to sit outside," he said.

Che Hashim won the traditionally Umno seat in 2008 by a slim 646-vote majority, benefiting from a swing in Chinese voters to earn a final tally of 4,399 votes to the 3,753 votes collected by Umno's Mohamad Saufi Deraman, who was the incumbent at the time.

PAS' defence of Galas however is expected to be difficult, considering that it is located within the Gua Musang parliamentary constituency, held for the past three decades by Umno veteran Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (*left*) and surrounded by two Umno-held state constituencies - Nenggiri and Paloh - both of which were won by overwhelming majorities of over 2,000 votes in 2008.

Umno are seen to have an advantage going into the by-election, with the Orang Asli communities, who comprise 15 percent of the voters, believed to be loyal to Razaleigh, the man appointed as the BN election director for this contest.