

**Today Malaysians decide**  
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The nation's 12th general election is today with polling started right on dot at 8am in all 7,950 polling stations throughout the country. MCPX

At stake are 214 parliamentary seats and 501 state seats, the outcome of which are in the hands of 10.92 million registered voters.

polling day 080308 voter ballot box 02On nomination day, the ruling BN won eight parliamentary seats and three state seats uncontested. In the opposition front PAS managed to win one state seat uncontested.

After 13 days of campaigning period, all political parties and their candidates stopped their campaigning at midnight yesterday as per the Election Commission rules.

Voters can cast their ballots until 5pm.

There are a total of 10,922,139 registered voters, of which 1,409,395 are first-time voters.

The election is expected to be a close one in several states but analysts predict that the BN will extend its half-century rule. BN is expected to retain its two-thirds majority in Parliament.

The coalition won 91 percent of parliamentary seats in 2004 elections, but its majority is expected to be clipped this time as it suffers a backlash from ethnic Chinese and Indians.

Dominated by Muslim Malays who make up 60 percent of the population of the multicultural nation, the coalition is composed of 14 race-based political parties.

Three opposition parties have formed a loose alliance for the elections, and agreed to field just one candidate against the coalition in each seat, to avoid three-cornered contests that have split their support in the past.

**Vote wisely**

BN chairperson Abdullah Ahmad Badawi also has urged Malaysians to come out and vote wisely.

abdullah ahmad badawi polling day vote 080308 02"Don't be emotional... consider what the candidates contesting in the election can do. Think of our future... our children and grandchildren," he said in an exclusive interview broadcast live by TV3.

He said the voters should place their trust on the party that could fulfil their aspiration.

"I hope you will consider this when you go and cast your ballots tomorrow," he said.

Abdullah said the people should not be easily duped by the various promises which could not be fulfilled.

A rainy weather is also expected in almost all states later in the day.

Meanwhile the Election Commission said that the first result is expected to be known as early as 7pm while the attaining of a simple majority is expected to be announced around 10.30pm.

Commission's secretary Kamaruzaman Mohd Noor said this was based on its preparedness for the election as well as the improved information and communications technology infrastructure it was using.

EC chairperson Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman expects about 75 percent of the registered voters to cast their votes.

Malaysiakini will be providing live reports as the results are known tonight.

### **PM: We won't cheat**

Rights monitors and opposition leaders have warned the coalition, which has ruled for half a century, may use phantom voters and manipulate postal votes in tightly fought seats, but Abdullah rejected those allegations today.

"Enough of that. They are just looking for excuses in the event they do not win," he said in his Kepala Batas constituency, where he arrived to vote dressed in the blue of the BN.

"I am confident that everything will go on smoothly today. The question of rigging need not arise. Why are they thinking about that? Do they think we are cheats?"

Police laid on a heavy security presence at the Kepala Batas polling station, in a village surrounded by paddy fields and coconut trees, and made up of traditional stilted Malay houses.

"We should have a strong government. I am happy with Abdullah's leadership," said Ann Idris, 46, a Malay woman wearing the traditional headscarf who was lining up to vote.

"There is no need for a strong opposition to play the role of check and balance. The government can police itself."

Elsewhere in Penang late yesterday - the final day of the election campaign - PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim delivered a thundering speech to thousands of supporters, mostly Chinese who dominate the population there.

"We have no choice but to defeat the ruling government at all costs to save our country," Anwar told the crowd.

"In these 2008 polls, Malays, Chinese and Indians have to unite to ensure the Barisan Nasional falls," he roared. "It must be a battle by the people to throw out corrupt leaders."

### **Nik Aziz confident of winning if...**

A major battleground in the campaign is Kelantan, the only state the BN does not hold and which it is hoping to snatch from the Islamic party which has ruled there for 18 years.

nik aziz angry and pas 020607"I am very confident of winning if there is real democracy in Malaysia and there is transparency in the system," Kelantan chief minister Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat said as he cast his ballot in Kota Bharu.

"PAS should retain control because we have done a good job, honoured God's word and carried out Islamic doctrines," said Niz Aziz, who is also the spiritual leader of PAS.

Dressed in traditional white flowing robes and turban, he warned against a vote for the coalition, which has promised billions of dollars in development funds for the impoverished state.

"If BN takes control, they will dismantle everything we have done and there will be mixing of the sexes and the removal of halal practices," he said.

Political banners - the blue-and-white of the BN and green-and-white PAS flags - that have festooned the state were drenched in seasonal rains as voters walked along muddy village paths to polling centres.

Elderly Kelantanese women in traditional headscarves and flowing outfits walked alongside young relatives in jeans and shirts.

Kelantan is the last remaining stronghold for PAS after it suffered a decline in popularity in recent years, and it rules the 45-seat state legislature with just a single-seat majority.

The party of Islamic scholars has changed tack, dropping the hardline rhetoric that alienated voters in 2004 elections and focusing on bread-and-butter issues such as inflation and social welfare.

### **And so is Awang Adek**

Elsewhere in Kota Bharu, Awang Adek Hussin, who is leading the BN's charge to retake Kelantan, was in a confident mood.

dr awang adek hussin"I believe the momentum is on our side," he told reporters. "BN will definitely lead with a comfortable majority."

Analysts say that out-of-state voters could be a deciding factor in the elections and both sides have tried hard to court them.

"There could be about 40,000 Kelantanese returning to vote from (Kuala Lumpur) as we have registered about 25,000 so there are definitely many more expected to turn up," Awang Adek told AFP.

The ruling coalition has denied opposition accusations of vote buying and planting phantom voters that it says could shape the outcome in this hotly-contested state.

"I have come to give my support for PAS," said 34-year-old Mohammad Kasturi Ismail, who drove the long distance from Kuala Lumpur with his wife and baby daughter. "They are the best government for our way of life," he said.

However, for fruit seller Iskandar Abdul Bakar, 48, a vote for the BN means much-needed

development for the state.

"We should all vote for BN as they are offering us the best alternative," he said. "I am sure they will win today."

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