

General election: Key facts
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Malaysians go to the polls today for the nation's 12th general election. The ruling Barisan Nasional coalition is expected to win easily, but lose some of its majority. MCPX

Election day

10.9 million out of 27 million Malaysians are registered to vote in the country's 12th general elections. About 5.0 million voters are believed to be eligible but unregistered.

Individual candidates are elected on the first-past-the-post system and the party with the most seats wins.

Some 7,950 polling stations will open for a single day of voting which begins at 8.00am and ends at 5.00pm. The first results are expected to emerge within hours of the polls closing.

The elections were called more than a year before the expiry of the government's term. Analysts say the government was concerned the economy will weaken in 2008. Political dissident Anwar Ibrahim, a former deputy premier, is also banned from standing for public office until April.

The elections are to cost RM200 million to conduct, and will be carried out by some 200,000 Election Commission personnel.

Key issues

Inflation - the rising cost of fuel and food is the top concern among voters, according to opinion polls.

Mounting ethnic tensions between majority Muslim Malays and minority ethnic Chinese and Indians who are worried over rising "Islamisation".

High crime rates including "snatch" thefts which have become a menace in urban areas.

Corruption, and criticisms that Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has not carried out promises made in the 2004 election campaign to eradicate it.

These issues have triggered a series of rare street protests in recent months, over electoral reform, toll price hikes, and inflation, as well as claims of discrimination by ethnic Indians.

Key political parties

Barisan Nasional - The race-based ruling coalition has ruled Malaysia since independence from Britain in 1957, with Umno dominating the 14-party grouping.

PAS - The Islamic party rose to prominence in 1999 polls and while its position has weakened since then, it still controls Kelantan, the only state not under BN rule.

PKR - Formed in 1999 after the dismissal and arrest of former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim, PKR is officially led by his wife Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.

DAP - Launched in 1966 with support primarily from minority Chinese frustrated with Malay privileges, it teamed up with PAS and PKR in the 1999 polls but withdrew in 2001 amid a row over PAS's ambitions for an Islamic state.

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