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PM softens ground ahead of list

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WELL RECEIVED: Slightly longer campaign period gets thumbs up from Barisan Nasional, opposition

KUALA LUMPUR

SOME 13.3 million Malaysians will go the polls on Sunday, May 5 in the country's 13th general election, the Election Commission announced yesterday.

It fixed April 20 for nomination, setting the stage for a 15-day official campaign period — the longest in three decades.

EC chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof said 13,268,002 voters were eligible to vote based on the electoral roll to be gazetted today.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak welcomed the slightly longer campaign period — two days more than that in the 2008 general election.

"It is the decision of the EC, we

accept. It means that they (EC) tried to make a decision that reflects a healthy democratic process in Malaysia," the Barisan Nasional chairman told reporters at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Najib was speaking after a closed-door session with the immediate past BN lawmakers to help "soften the ground" ahead of the announcement of BN candidates.

The opposition generally welcomed the 15-day campaign period, describing it as adequate and reasonable.

Next on the BN's main agenda is the announcement of its candidates on Monday (April 15), according to a highly-placed BN source.

On Monday, Najib is due to hand

out the *watikan* (letter of credential) to respective state director of elections (mostly menteri besar or chief ministers) who in turn will announce the lists in their respective state capitals.

The BN will name all the 222 parliamentary and 505 state assembly candidates for the polls.

Yesterday's session with Najib and the naming of the candidates well ahead of the April 20 nomination day are unprecedented in the BN's electioneering.

News of the May 5 election helped the ringgit to appreciate to its highest level since Jan 21. It rose 0.4 per cent to 3.0245 to the dollar.

It also lifted the main Bursa Malaysia stock index to close 0.35 per cent or 5.93 points to 1,696.2 —

a record closing high.

Najib, seeking to renew mandate for his four-year administration, hinted yesterday that some incumbents might be dropped to pave the way for fresh faces to ensure a solid BN victory both at the Federal and state levels.

Delegates who attended the closed-door session said Najib stressed the need for BN grassroots leaders to support the top leadership's decision pertaining to the selection of candidates.

In the hour-long session, he emphasised that the grassroots leaders should not be distracted by the ultimate BN goal of forming the government.

Saying it was impossible to please everyone, Najib admitted

the decision would disappoint some but he hoped they would not be "too disappointed" to the extent of leaving the party.

In jest, he said those who are dropped should not "merajuk" (sulk) for more than a day.

As BN moved to close its ranks ahead of the decisive polls, the opposition bloc continued to bicker among themselves on the selection of candidates.

Several members of Parti Keadilan Rakyat and DAP in Pahang, Perlis and Johor have threatened to stand as independent candidates in protest.

Opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim warned yesterday that he would expel those who stand as independents.