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Wrangle over who's standing where

Scramble for seats heats up as nomination day draws near

BY PATHMA SUBRAMANIAM AND ZAKIAH KOYA

With the April 20 nomination day just days away, political coalitions in the country are still scrambling to finalise their candidate list, despite both Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) previously boasting that they were all ready for the 13th general election (GE).

BN chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak has, from the dissolution of Parliament on April 3 itself, warned that eager contenders who fail to be picked as candidates are only allowed to sulk for 24 hours, after which he expects them to kiss, make up and go all out to campaign for BN.

Najib also said all should keep in mind that the ultimate purpose of an election is to form a formidable government, and not an avenue to fulfil personal objectives.

With such "advice" dished out openly, one can only imagine the kind of heavy lobbying that must be going on among local BN warlords hoping to secure a candidacy.

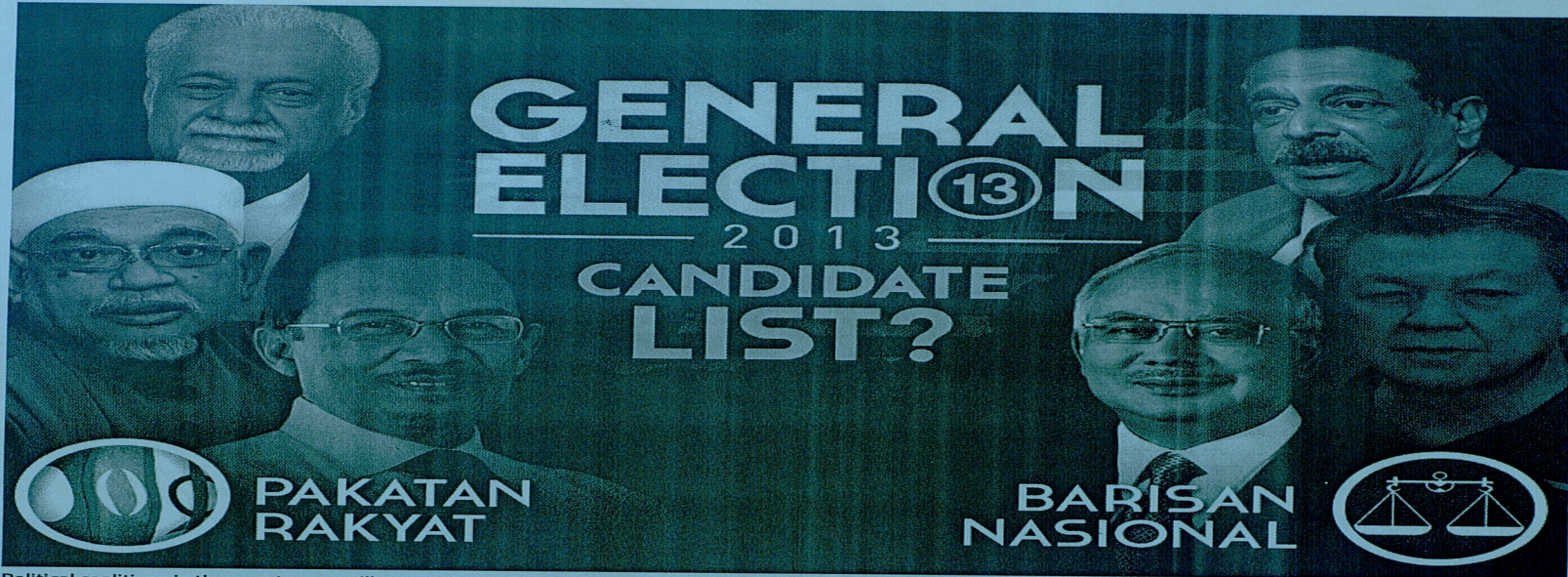
This is happening not only in Umno, the party with the lion's share of seats, but in MIC as well. Its president Datuk Seri G Palanivel is said to have booted out another MIC leader, Datuk S K Devamany, from the parliamentary seat of Cameron Highlands so that he is almost sure of a comfortable win in what is considered a safe seat. Devamany would be moved to Sungai Siput instead.

While individual candidates vie to be nominated, parties in BN are also said to have started squabbling, based on speculation that certain seats traditionally belonging to certain parties may be loaned to fellow parties this GE all in the name of "winnability".

MCA president Datuk Dr Chua Soi Lek, who has decided to sit out this GE, had to "console" MCA members and say that MCA will get back the "loaned" seats after the delineation exercise which will be carried out after this election.

The second biggest party in BN is said to have been urged by fellow member party leaders to give way to Umno, MIC and PPP.

In Johor, the caretaker Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman of Umno offered to contest in the MCA seat of Gelang Patah after DAP's Lim Kit Siang was announced as the candidate.



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samana state seat in Melaka goes to PPP and the Kuantan parliamentary seat in Pahang has been loaned to Umno.

And then there's the Wangsa Maju parliamentary seat which is currently caught in a tug of war between Umno and MCA. Other MCA seats "under negotiation" are the parliamentary seats of Tebrau (Johor) and Padang Serai (Kedah) and the state seat of Tanah Rata (Perak).

All this is causing BN chairman Najib a real headache as he tries to sort out just who is winnable, who is undroppable and who is a liability for the coalition.

Jostling for seats not confined to BN
Within PR, fellow parties PAS, PKR and DAP have squabbled both openly and behind

cases, it has come down to "who makes the announcement first".

Piecemeal or incomplete announcements so far have only added fuel to allegations of infighting and "undemocratic" practices within the opposition coalition.

DAP and PKR in particular have had major disagreements over seat allocations in Johor, Pahang, Sabah and Sarawak, with the former insisting on contesting all the Chinese majority seats. One can only guess what impact the bad blood between the PR partners will have on the election results.

Seat allocation discussions between PR and PR-friendly parties such as Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM) have also run aground, with PKR insisting that the socialist party contest under its banner, which they did in

Kota Damansara, Semenyih and Sungai Siput seats, wants to contest under its own banner this time around.

DAP is also refusing to give way to PSM to contest in Jelapang, while both Semenyih and Kota Damansara may see a three-cornered fight between PKR, PSM and BN.

In Sabah, PKR de facto chief Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who was supposed to announce the PKR candidate list in Likas last Friday, had to cancel it at the last moment over unresolved conflicts. At this rate, we will only really know who is standing where for sure come nomination day.

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