

**PAS gets 70 federal seats, finalising candidates now, says Mat Sabu**  
**Malaysian Insider**  
**August 05, 2012**  
**By Amin Iskandar**

SHAH ALAM, Aug 5 — PAS will contest 70 federal seats in the next elections and has nearly finished selecting candidates who are mostly technocrats says the Islamist party's deputy president Mohamad Sabu.

The veteran politician, popularly called Mat Sabu, said the party has finished 90 per cent of seat allocation talks with its Pakatan Rakyat (PR) allies ahead of the 13th general elections, which must be called by April 2013. In Election 2008, the party contested 66 out of the 222 federal seats.

"We have many new candidates, especially in the southern states like Negeri Sembilan, Malacca and Johor. In Selangor, we also have a few," he told The Malaysian Insider in an interview.

PAS, one of the three main partners in the opposition pact, has made its intentions clear: to take the electoral battle right up to the gates of its age-old political foe Umno's fortress in Johor — where the grand old Malay party was founded — with heavyweight Salahuddin Ayub leading the Islamist party's troops.

The move to increase PAS' seat allocation is seen as necessary as the party has the smallest share — 23 seats — among the three opposition parties at federal level. PKR, its lynchpin party controlled by Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, has 27 while the Chinese-dominated DAP has the most at 28 parliamentary seats.

The majority of PR parliamentary seats will still be distributed according to the status quo, but with slight revisions, Mohamad said.

"The seats in Sarawak and Sabah are still being negotiated.

"But the seats for PAS will be more than in 2008, more than 70 seats," he said.

The recent defection of two senior BN leaders in Sabah over the last weekend — Beaufort MP Datuk Seri Lajim Ukin and Tuaran MP Datuk Seri Wilfred Bumburing — who have pledged openly their support to PR is likely to make Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak pause over his decision to call for elections.

The Malaysian Insider understands that Najib had previously toyed with the idea of elections in September, after the Muslim celebration of Aidilfitri following their month-long fast; but may now delay calling for polls to later this year.

The move to field Salahuddin, who is PAS vice-president and a two-term MP for Kubang Kerian in Kelantan, in Johor is seen as the highest-level of commitment for the opposition party in its endeavour to take federal control.

PAS is seen today as a major component in the PR pact in its bid to challenge the hegemony of the powerful BN, which has yet to be defeated in national polls since being formed by Tun Razak Hussein, the country's second prime minister and father to current PM Datuk Seri Najib Razak, from the ashes of the former ruling pact known as the Alliance in 1963.

Mat Sabu, another PAS heavyweight, however, will run in Pendang, another PAS fortress in Kedah that was previously held by respected religious teacher and the party's former president, Datuk Fadzil Noor, who had led the opposition parties to counter the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition head-to-head in a previous alliance known as Barisan Alternatif (BA).

The merger, however, was short-lived, formed in the run-up to the 1998 election but dissolved shortly before the 2004 polls.

The incumbent Pendang MP, Dr Mohd Hayati Othman, will be fielded in the Kedah state seat as part of the party's measures to administrate the northern state should PAS retain victory at the next polls.

Recently though, a news portal reported a movement to head off the PAS juggernaut in Pendang.

But several PAS leaders, including another vice-president Datuk Mahfuz Omar, has denied the report.

Mohamad also said that the BN's old playbook in wooing voters according to race will no longer succeed as the Chinese community has shown they are no longer frightened of the hudud, or the strict Islamic criminal code, that has often been used as a bogey by BN's Chinese components, MCA and Gerakan.

"As long as PAS picks the democratic way as part of its struggle, the people especially the non-Muslims do not have to worry," he said.

"If PAS implements hudud, PAS will have to carry out a public consultation to get the support of all Muslim and non-Muslim MPs to amend the Constitution to enforce hudud.

"Not just hudud, whatever that is desired that involves amending the Constitution requires the support of the majority of parliamentarians," Mohamad said.

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