

**BN likely to win GE13 with rural support, says The Economist
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By Boo Su-Lyn**

KUALA LUMPUR, March 22 — Barisan Nasional (BN) is expected to win Election 2013 as constituency sizes give more weight to rural voters, international current affairs magazine The Economist said yesterday.

The Economist, however, pointed out that the outcome of the national polls, which is expected to be the most keenly contested in recent times, was in doubt for the first time in Malaysian history.

“The odds still favour the BN,” The Economist wrote in an article titled “Malaysia’s looming election: Video nasties”.

“Constituency sizes give greater weight to voters in the countryside, who tend to be more conservative than the wired, cosmopolitan and cynical residents of the cities,” it added.

Election watchdog Tindak Malaysia said last April that one rural voter was worth an average of six urban voters, based on the way electoral boundaries were drawn.

Tindak Malaysia founder PY Wong had pointed out that the ruling coalition won 112 out of the smallest 139 federal seats in Election 2008, giving it a simple majority in Parliament with just 18.9 per cent of the popular vote. The seats have not been changed for Election 2013.

Wong also said that malapportionment — unequally-sized constituencies — and gerrymandering — manipulation of electoral boundaries — allowed BN to sweep 62 of the smallest seats with just 6.2 per cent of the popular vote.

The Economist noted yesterday that the opposition pact comprising PKR, the DAP and PAS marginally won the popular vote in Peninsular Malaysia at 51 per cent in the historic 2008 general election that saw BN lose its two-thirds parliamentary majority.

“Affirmative-action policies introduced more than 40 years ago to favour Malays and other indigenous groups over the Chinese and Indian minorities were no longer enough to ensure an overwhelming victory for the ruling coalition,” said the magazine.

“In fact, the outcome is in doubt, for the first time in Malaysia’s history,” it added, referring to Election 2013 that will likely be called in weeks.

The Economist also noted that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had the advantage of deciding when to call elections, depriving Pakatan Rakyat (PR) the chance of postponing elections in Penang, Selangor, Kedah and Kelantan.

“Simultaneous elections tend to favour the BN, with its greater resources,” it said. The Economist pointed out that the mainstream media’s minimal coverage of the Sulu incursion in Sabah would help prevent a backlash among Sabahan voters of Filipino origin.

“Indeed, even if the invasion might harm the BN in Sabah, the government’s handling of it may have helped it overall,” the magazine wrote.

The Economist added that the mainstream press largely ignored revived interest in the 2006 murder of Mongolian Altantuya Shaariibuu after private investigator P. Balasubramaniam died of a heart attack last Friday.

"In opinion polls, Mr Najib remains very popular, with an approval rating of 61 per cent in one recent survey," said the magazine.

But The Economist noted that repeated sex allegations against Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim could harm his popularity. Anwar sued pro-Umno blogger "Papa Gomo" yesterday for allegedly attempting to link him to a sex video.

"That he (Anwar) still has some chance of becoming prime minister is testimony to widespread anger at the corruption endemic in Malaysia," said The Economist, referring to a video released by UK-based NGO Global Witness last Tuesday, which showed shady land deals in Sarawak implicating Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Taib Mahmud.

"Its many viewers in Malaysia are furious. But they are not surprised," added The Economist.

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