

Countdown Has Started To GE13
Bernama
10 April, 2013

KUALA LUMPUR, April 10 (Bernama) -- The countdown to the 13th General Election has started after the Election Commission (EC) Wednesday set May 5 as polling day, and the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) announcing its candidates will be named within days.

Nomination for the 222 parliamentary and 505 state seats at stake is fixed for April 20.

The 15-day interval, two days more than the 2008 General Election, is the longest campaign period in over four decades for the BN and rival parties to woo over 13 million voters in the most intense race ever for the mandate to lead Malaysia for the next five years.

Shortly after the EC announced the polling and nomination dates, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak sent pulses racing in the BN camp when he said the coalition would reveal its candidates this week.

Under close watch is whether the BN will field Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman to take on DAP advisor Lim Kit Siang in the Gelang Patah parliamentary seat in Johor, and the BN line-ups for the rest of Johor, as well as in the other battleground states of Kedah, Perak and Selangor.

There was speculation that he would name the candidates today, after chairing a meeting with elected representatives and 2,000 election machinery workers at the BN headquarters here.

A BN aide said the announcement of the candidates would be done by the respective state liaison chiefs, according to past tradition.

BN secretary-general Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor had said recently, the BN chairman would hand over the candidates' names to the state liaison chairmen to present appointment letters to the selected candidates.

Despite the intense speculation and reports of incumbents being dropped, the BN chairman has not dropped any hint of who's who in his list, except that he would be defending his Pekan seat in Pahang.

Najib confirmed today, that some seats would be swapped among the component parties and that the BN was also open to independents who are accepted by the people to contest under the BN banner.

In addition to public acceptance, he said he had to take into account that the selected candidates would be able to form a strong national government and also at state levels.

"We have to consider the overall so that the decision will be the fairest possible," he told a packed media conference after the meeting.

Najib, who is leading the coalition into the race for the first time as prime minister, is seeking a big mandate from the largest electorate in Malaysian history.

With 13,268,002 names on the electoral roll, one in two Malaysians is eligible to vote.

The DAP and its opposition partners, PKR and PAS, which have been naming their candidates on a staggered basis, welcomed the longer campaign period with DAP publicity chief Tony Pua and PAS secretary-general Datuk Mustafa Ali conceding it was adequate and reasonable.

Voters heaved a sigh of relief that polling will be on a Sunday because only yesterday, EC chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof said that balloting might not necessarily be on a weekend.

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