

**Fifteen days stumping 'enough' for BN, Pakatan disagrees
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 11 — Not since Election 1982 have Malaysian politicians been given 15 days to go on the hustings, yet the Election Commission's (EC) lengthy campaigning period has drawn mixed responses from the potential candidates.

Would-be office bearers from Barisan Nasional (BN) say the two weeks and a day between the nomination of their candidacy must be filed on April 20 and May 5 when voters decide their state and federal representatives is "just nice" for them to get down and familiar with their constituents and articulate their ideas.

But the majority of politicians from the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) bloc disagree.

"There are pros and cons for this lengthy campaign period. Fifteen days should provide more time, especially for new candidates to introduce themselves. It'll come to their favour because they have ample time for people to get to know them and to articulate their policies.

"The downside is that when it's too long it'll cost more money, because of the time," Datuk Henrynus Amin, secretary-general of Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), a component of the 13-party BN, told The Malaysian Insider.

He said he was in favour of the length as it gave candidates time to explain their plans to the people, pointing out that some constituencies in Sabah are nearly the same size as Pahang in Peninsular Malaysia.

Henrynus' coalition-mate, Sabah Umno secretary Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan, voiced a similar view.

The outgoing Kota Belud MP said the 15-day period is sufficient for candidates, especially those in rural seats like his, to get down to visit each village and go on the stump.

"After all Malaysia has been in campaign mode since 2008," Abdul Rahman said.

Sabah Progressive Party president Datuk Yong Teck Lee echoed the sentiment.

"Yes, two weeks' campaign is enough. Campaign has been going on for five years lah," said the former state chief minister, who had batted for the BN in Election 2008 but quit the coalition after a falling out just months later.

Sabah's opposition State Reform Party deputy chief Daniel John Jambun said the EC's scheduling was "just nice" for a quick revision as his party had laid the groundwork for the past five years.

While Sabah DAP secretary Dr Edwin Bosi felt 15 days was "ample time to work and reach the people", he said the opposition had still ended up with the short end of the stick due to the massive state machinery including the television and radio networks at the ruling BN's disposal.

Across the South China Sea, dissatisfaction at the two-week electioneering became more evident among the three-party PR politicians.

"Ok, two-week campaign. But it should be 21 days as demanded by Bersih," PAS deputy president Mohamad Sabu told The Malaysian Insider, referring to the election watchdog's proposals to the election regulator, which had also been backed by a parliamentary polls reform panel.

His political ally from PKR and Lembah Pantai MP, Nurul Izzah Anwar, also hit out at the EC for fixing polling day on a Sunday.

"It's not surprising, it's not like PR or the opposition has any control.

"It would be difficult for people in Kelantan and Terengganu, Kedah," she said, after a news conference at her party headquarters in Petaling Jaya yesterday in an immediate reaction to the EC's May 5 polling day announcement.

Unlike elsewhere in the country, Sunday is a working day in the two PAS-led states in Kedah and Kelantan as well as BN-run Terengganu. Their weekend falls on Friday and Saturday.

But not all opposition politicians shared the same view, even those from the same party.

PAS's Datuk Seri Nizar Jamaluddin viewed the 15-day stumping period as a positive sign from the EC.

"I think I must congratulate the SPR (the Malay acronym for the EC) for extending the number of days for us to do the campaign, which means we have got longer period to inform the voters of what's going on at the moment," the Perak lawmaker said.

"With that 14, 15 days' campaign period, it's more like a compromise between the usual eight days' campaign and the 21 days that we requested. So I think that's a good sign."

Malaysians will decide on May 5 whether to keep in federal power the BN that has governed uninterrupted for the last 56-years, or switch to a new coalition offered by PR.

A total of 222 parliamentary and 505 state seats are up for grabs in what promises to be the closest contest ever.

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