

**Najib meets Barisan heads over GE13**  
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PETALING JAYA: In further signs of impending elections, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak met Barisan Nasional leaders to finalise seat allocation and selection of candidates.

At the marathon session that took more than seven hours in Putrajaya, the Prime Minister and Barisan chairman met the coalition leaders in batches to tie up loose ends yesterday.

Najib and his deputy Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Barisan secretary-general Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor met the leaders one state at a time.

A menteri besar and state Barisan chairman said the main agenda was to look at the proposed lists of candidates for the Barisan component parties, except Umno.

"There may be inter-party seat-swapping in some states, but I do not think the dissolution (of Parliament) will be before the Prime Minister unveils the annual report of Pemandu (which oversees the Economic and Government Transformation Programmes) on Tuesday," he said.

On the candidates, he said there would be a "good mix" of incumbents and new faces.

The meeting started at 12.30pm at the Prime Minister's office and continued until after 7pm.

"The meeting also focused on ensuring that Barisan fielded candidates who could win," said an aide to a minister.

The first to meet Najib, Muhyiddin and Adnan was Johor Barisan chairman and Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman.

Next was MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek, followed by MIC president Datuk Seri G. Palanivel and Gerakan president Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon.

The session ended with a meeting of Sabah leaders.

Meanwhile, in anticipation of early polls, the Election Commission will appoint the 222 returning officers on March 22, a few days before Parliament is widely predicted to be dissolved.

This would make it the first time in Malaysia's electoral history that returning officers would be appointed before the dissolution of Parliament, said EC deputy chairman Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar.

"This is to ensure that our preparations proceed smoothly and we are not caught off-guard by the timing of the dissolution.

"With more overseas Malaysians now allowed to vote by post, the returning officers will have more duties to perform, so they need a head start," he added.

It is widely speculated that March 25 is when Najib will seek the assent of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to dissolve the Dewan Rakyat, after which elections must be held within 60 days. The dates will be set by the EC.

Wan Ahmad said the returning officers were especially important this time round due to the increase in the number of overseas postal voters whose applications they would have to process and approve as quickly as possible.

Advance voting for military and police personnel will also mean added responsibility for them.

A total of 13.3 million voters will be eligible to cast their ballots in the coming general election in over 8,000 polling centres.

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