

## **Balingian polls fixed for March 29**

**Free Malaysia Today**

**6 March 2014**

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PUTRAJAYA: The Election Commission (EC) today fixed March 29 as polling day for the Balingian state assembly seat by-election, while nomination would be on March 17.

In making the announcement, EC chairman Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof said the dates were decided following an EC meeting at the Commission's headquarters this morning.

Aziz Yusof also said during the entire election period the EC will be using Dewan Suarah Mesra in Mukah as the nomination and vote counting centre.

The EC announced that there will be 22 voting centres, 21 of which will be open during the normal voting day while one voting centre will be assigned for early voters.

"The EC will deploy 441 election officials from the Mukah town office to handle the election and the cost for the Balingian by-election is RM 910, 213 which is less than a million," he said.

When questioned why the dates for Balingian differed from that of Kajang, he said the main reason was to avoid politicians from making uncalled for comments.

The second reason he said is that his men were time constrained to prepare for the Balingian by-election.

"Usually it will be on the same date if two by-elections occur at the same time. This is to cut the cost and it will also save other people's time,"

"But this time, my men did not have enough time to complete their task as they have to prepare for the Kajang by-election, so we decided to have the Balingian by-election a week after,"

"We were caught by surprise on the former Kajang assemblyman's decision to resign so we have to do a lot of things,"

"We would also want to stop politicians from politicising everything," Aziz explained.

The EC chief also said that the Balingian by-election will be held on a Saturday as to allow the Christians in Mukah to attend Sunday mass.

"We will have it on a Saturday because we want the people or voters in Balingian to be able to go to the church the next day," he added.

The Balingian state seat fell vacant following the resignation of Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud on Feb 28 after helming the state for 33 years.

Despite the barrage of criticisms, allegations of corruption, land grabs and power abuse, the

newly appointed Yang di-Pertua Negeri of Sarawak won the Balingian state seat in the 2011 Sarawak state election, beating independent candidate and former deputy education minister Salleh Jafaruddin with a 5, 154 vote majority.

The outgoing Taib garnered 6,210 votes to Salleh's 10, 056. PKR candidate Suriati Abdullah only received 871 votes.

Succeeding Taib is state Special Functions Minister Adenan Satem who is now the Sarawak chief minister. PBS, a component party of the Barisan Nasional, has yet to identify its candidate for the by-election.

Many had initially speculated that the Balingian by-election would be held simultaneously with the Kajang by-election in Selangor.

The Kajang by-election has been fixed for March 23, with nomination on March 11.

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Source: <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2014/03/06/balingian-polls-fixed-for-march-29/>