

## 5. POLITICAL PARTIES

At the time of the present election 40 political parties were known to be in existence though not all of them contested the elections. In the past, the ruling coalition was opposed by individual parties. What appeared distinctive about the 1990 elections was the emergence of a broadly based coalition opposition.

Until 15 October 1990 the Barisan Nasional (National Front) embraced the following political parties in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak:

- (i) United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)
- (ii) Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA)
- (iii) Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC)
- (iv) Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan)
- (v) Peoples' Progressive Party of Malaysia (PPP)
- (vi) Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS)
- (vii) United Sabah National Organisation (USNO)
- (viii) Parti Pesaka Bumiputra Bersatu Sarawak (PPBB)
- (ix) Sarawak United Peoples' Party (SUPP)
- (x) Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS)

The PBS left the National Front coalition on 15 October 1990 and allied itself with the Opposition coalition.

The main Opposition parties were:

- (i) Parti Semangat '46
- (ii) Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS)
- (iii) The Democratic Action Party (DAP)
- (iv) Barisan Jemaah Islamiah Se-Malaysia (BERJASA)
- (v) Bersatu Rakyat Jelata Sabah (Berjaya)
- (vi) Kongress Indian Muslim Malaysia (KMMA)
- (vii) Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM)
- (viii) Persatuan Rakyat Malaysia Sarawak (Permas)
- (ix) Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat (Akar)
- (x) Sarawak United Labour Party (PLUS)
- (xi) Malaysian Indian Progressive Front (AMIPF)

(xii) Malaysian Solidarity Party (MSP)

All the political parties have their party symbols. The symbols used at the 1990 elections are reproduced as **Annex IX**.

The ruling coalition and the Opposition coalition comprising Semangat '46, DAP, PRM, MSP and AMIPF launched their manifestos on 12 and 13 October respectively. In very general terms the emphasis of the BN manifesto was on maintaining continuity and building upon its record in office while the Opposition emphasised the need for change of political leadership and national economic and social direction.

## 6. THE CAMPAIGN

The election campaign lasted just 10 days; it was described as the first since independence which presented the voters of Malaysia with an alternative alliance to the ruling coalition. This was an important election, with over 1,000 candidates and made for a short, intensive, and passionate campaign. The ghost of 1969 still hovers and many of the restrictions which circumscribed this election stem from that period.

In addition to the restrictions on the press which are dealt with in the following section, the restrictions on political campaigning are embodied in several laws including the Internal Security Act and the Police Act. These give the authorities powers to control political activities. The end result was an orderly, peaceful but controlled election campaign.

To many outsiders the many restrictions might seem surprising, but they were accepted by most Malaysians who assured us that they were necessary deterrents to any activities which might lead to communal violence. However it was put to us on several occasions that these restrictions have outlived their usefulness. Indeed, the Opposition alliance made this one of the planks of their manifesto.

The freedom of candidates to campaign without undue restriction is one of the principal attributes of a free and fair election and these campaign activities should enable a candidate to get his message across to the electorate through the media and advertising, through public and private meetings freely held and by house to house canvassing. We also considered that it was important for us to take into account such issues as whether all candidates had adequate freedom of movement and expression, had reasonable access to the media, and whether political meetings were prevented or even disrupted by the security forces or other bodies.

Only one type of political meeting is permitted. This is an indoor meeting called a ceramah and for which police permission is required. It must be held in an enclosed area such as a hall, hotel or private house. The police can intervene and stop the meeting if it attracts 20 or more people in the public area and if in the opinion of the police the meeting could be