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HEADLINE: Kadazandusun and Murut shift support to the BN

BYLINE: By Joseph Bingkasan

BODY:

AFTER more than two decades in political limbo at the national level, the Kadazandusun and Murut have finally realised the frustrations of being left out of mainstream development.

The non-Muslim Bumiputera communities decided in the Nov 29 parliamentary election that they would not lose anything by throwing in their support for the Barisan Nasional.

The Kadazandusun and Murut contributed to the BN's victory in 17 of the 20 parliamentary seats in Sabah, returning five of their community leaders.

Three of the winning Kadazandusun and Murut leaders who won are from the United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun (UPKO) and two from Umno.

UPKO president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok won Kinabalu; his political adviser Wilfred Madius Tangau and political secretary Philip Lasimbang wrested Tuaran and Penampang from PBS, respectively.

Umno's Ronald Kiandee retained Beluran for the BN while his counterpart, Rizalman Abdullah @ Sumin, defeated PBS secretary-general Radin Malleh for the Tenom seat.

Though there is no denying that since Sabah gained independence through Malaysia on Sept 16, 1963, the Kadazandusun and Murut have progressed, this has not been on par with the other communities.

As in the previous elections, whether State or parliamentary, it had been impressed upon these communities by opposition parties that communal politics was the best for them.

And the Kadazandusun and Murut heeded such views, much to their disadvantage. The pullout of Parti Bersatu Sabah, then the State ruling party, from the BN just before polling day in the October 1990 general election, was the last straw for these communities.

The Kadazandusun-based PBS, headed by Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan, was in power, but being in opposition to the central Government, Sabah continued to lag behind other States.

In the February 1994 State election, the PBS won and formed the State Government and Pairin stayed as Chief Minister. However, he was forced to step down a month later due to some of his assemblymen ditching him for the BN. The BN then took over the State Government.

This was the beginning of the declining support for the PBS.

In the 1995 parliamentary election, the PBS contested in all the 20 parliamentary seats but only won eight. However two MPs later crossed over to the BN. The State election in March this year showed the PBS was no longer the popular party it used to be when it only managed to win 17 of the 48 seats.

The Sabah BN went into the Nov 29 parliamentary election confident of thrashing the PBS, to win at least 16 of the 20 MP seats. The BN took 17 seats, giving the PBS only three seats in Parliament for the next five years.

Commenting on the result, Chief Minister Datuk Seri Osu Sukam, who is also Sabah BN head, said winning the 17 seats showed that the attitude of the Kadazandusun and Murut towards BN had changed greatly.

"I am proud and happy the results show that these communities have changed a lot. They trust the BN," he said. As a matter of fact, Osu's wife is a Kadazandusun.

He said, in Keningau, the heartland of the Kadazandusun and Murut, the PBS president retained the seat with only a 250 vote majority over the 12,533 votes obtained by his opponent, another Kadazandusun and Murut leader, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah president Tan Sri Joseph Kurup.

On his defeat, Kurup said it was an uphill task to unseat Pairin but the result indicated that the latter's popularity and support among the Kadazandusun and Murut was declining. In 1995, Pairin defeated Kurup's political secretary Elron Angin with a 8,774 vote majority.

"The next time (election), Pairin can be defeated. Though I lost this time, the votes I obtained showed that I am still of use to BN," Kurup said.

Dompok attributed his success in wresting the Kinabalu seat from the PBS to the desire of the Kadazandusun and Murut not to be left out of mainstream development.

"There is a wind of change, a feeling to change the political scenario after the last few elections," the former Chief Minister said.

He claimed the communities realised that the present PBS leadership had "lost direction and no longer cared about the Kadazandusun and Murut problems".

Dompok expressed confidence in the Kadazandusun and Murut communities' continued strong support for the BN.

Now that the election is over, it is incumbent upon all BN MPs to work for the benefit of the people. Much focus will be on the Kadazandusun and Murut MPs. They must not be complacent. It is time for the MPs to ensure the people's confidence and trust in the BN continues to grow.

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