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Sarawak-Kedayan (Election-Focus)
KEDAYAN VOTES FOR THE GRAB

By: Mawi Taip

MIRI, Sept 3 (Bernama) -- Hasan Bungsu, 71, may be of same age as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

While Dr Mahathir leads the nation to its glorious success, and earns the world respect for it, Hassan is just the village head of Kampung Opak, which has only 26 houses with about 100 residents to look after.

All the residents are Kedayans, a minority group in Sarawak, said to have come from Brunei. They will be among those from about 20 villages in the Lambir constituency who will be out to choose their "rep" or "wakil" in the State Legislative Assembly in the Sept 7 and 8 election.

According to unofficial figures, there are 20,000 Kedayans in the Lambir constituency, and 5,000 of them are registered voters.

There has been no records on the Kedayan origin, but according to the Kampung Satap imam, Bidin Lani, 52, the Kedayans originated from Brunei, having migrated here in the 1920s.

They were led by Haji Dol Gapar, a religious devout from their former Brunei settlement, and had since split to live the present 20 kampungs in Lambir, -- the bigger settlements being Kampung Kelulut, Kampung Selangau, kampung Subak, Kampung Kejapil, Kampung Tiris, Kampung Sepurau, Kampung Satap and Kampung Angus.

All the Kedayans are Muslims, leading a life like the Malays and even their houses are designed and built like those of Sarawak Malays.

Virtually 90 per cent of them speak Brunei or Sabah Malay which is easily detected from the suffix "bah".

In view of their minority and their similar way of life as the Malays, the Kedayans are classified as Malays in the voters racial breakdown for any particular constituency.

The Lambir constituency has 19,489 voters, of whom 9,837 are Malays/Melanaus, 3,389 Chinese, 6,075 Ibans and 178 other races. Since the Kedayans form 50 per cent of those listed as Malays/Melanaus, they become the deciding factor for the candidate in the next week election.

Three candidates whose fate will depend on the Kedayan votes are Aidan Wing of the Barisan Nasional, Mohdar Ismail and Janting anak Jawa, both Independents.

In the 1987 election, the constituency was won by Datuk Salleh Jafaruddin, a candidate from Permas, a Bumiputera party led by former Yang Dipertua Negeri and Chief Minister Tun Abdul Rahman Ya'akub. Datuk Salleh defeated BN's Usop Sani Wahab.

Usop however recaptured the seat in the 1991 election. He is making way in the current election to Aidan Wing, a former bank manager. who is likely to face a close fight from local born Mohdar Ismail.

The Kedayan votes will hinge on issues like development and the basic amenities for their kampungs, as well as other services as promised by the candidates, in addition to their strong personalities.

Hasan and his followers at kampung Opak appear to have lost interest to vote as they noticed that the "Yang Berhormat" who was elected in the previous elections did not fight for them.

The basic amenities like water supply and electricity are yet to be provided in the kampung when it is only just about 20 kilometres from Bekenu, one of Lambir's major towns.

Kampung Opak is only accessible by laterite road, built by a private company which operates a quarry near the kampung. "When it rains heavily

over two or three days, we are cut off from the outside world and we cannot go out to the shops, clinic and attend to our business in town," said Hassan.

The children have to trek for about an hour across jungles and hills before they reach the school, the nearest at Kampung Satap and Kampung Selangau.

According to him the MP for the area, Peter Chin seldom comes to visit them, although he has served the constituency for the fourth term, while Usop Sani Wahab comes only once during his two terms.

"However we hope the village will get all the basic amenities so that the future generation can have a better life.

"The question of education, preservation of customs and traditions, neglected customary land, scholarships for tertiary education and several other issues will decide the Kedayans votes," he said.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud who came to the village on Aug 30 for the opening of the Subis District Council building has apparently brought new hopes for them.

Abdul Taib in his speech announced the formation of the Sarawak Kedayan Welfare Authority and made an on the spot grant of RM50,000 for it.

The allocation is for additional science and mathematics classes for the Kedayan children to improve on the two subjects, vital for their schooling success. --BERNAMA

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