

06 AUG 1996

Election (News Focus)

MAHATHIR'S VISIT MAY HOLD CLUE TO SARAWAK ELECTION DATE

By: Rudy Rukimin Rambli

KUCHING, Aug 6 (Bernama) -- The two-day official visit to Sarawak by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, from tomorrow, may provide a clue to the much-speculated state election date.

Political observers believe the Prime Minister will use the visit, his second to Sarawak this year, to give a clear indication on the election which must be held before the end of November.

Chief Minister and state Barisan Nasional chairman Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud said recently he will consult Dr Mahathir on when to dissolve the State Assembly which has been enlarged from the current 56 seats to 62 for the coming polls.

Dr Mahathir will arrive in Sibu tomorrow afternoon and he will launch the RM10 million Bakun Trust Fund and attend a BN dinner at the Civic Centre the same night.

The next day, he will launch the Gerak Mesra programme in Mukah and open the Komag USA (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd factory at the Sama Jaya Free Industrial Trade Zone in Kuching.

He is scheduled to return to Kuala Lumpur on Aug 9.

The Bakun Trust Fund will finance the training and education of some 9,400 people who have to make way for the Bakun hydro-electric dam project.

The election date will be a dominant subject during the Prime Minister's visit as the current term of the State Assembly will expire in less than four months.

All the component parties of the Sarawak Barisan Nasional -- Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB), Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS) and Sarawak National Party (Snap) -- are all set for the election.

The parties have handed over their lists of candidates to the Chief Minister, state BN sources said.

No major issue stands between the component parties and the only active opposition party in the state, the DAP, is still looking for a suitable bait to fish for votes.

The allocation of the six new seats among the BN parties could have proved a thorny issue but this matter was nearing a satisfactory solution, sources said.

The six new seats created through the redelineation of electoral boundaries are Semariang (Kuching), Kedup (Serian), Nangka (Sibu), Jepak (Bintulu), Senadin (Miri) and Ba'Kelalan (Limbang).

Semariang and Jepak have been allocated to the PBB and Senadin to the SUPP while the state BN was said to be working out the allocation of the remaining three seats.

Chairman of the committee on the allocation of state seats Datuk Adenan Satem of the PBB said each party would be given the right to choose a candidate for at least one additional seat.

Political observers feel the BN would not face a big problem in the allocation of the new seats. The PBB, being the biggest BN component party, might get three seats (Semariang, Jepak and another) and the remaining three seats would be shared among the remaining three BN component parties.

In the 1991 state election, the PBB won 27 seats, the SUPP 16, Snap six and the PBDS, which was then a state opposition party, won seven.

Taib is expected to brief Dr Mahathir on the preparations for the election and submit the list of BN candidates to him. -- BERNAMA

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