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Election-Sabah

BN AHEAD IN LABUAN AND 12 AREAS IN SABAH

By: Jackson Sawatan

KOTA KINABALU, Nov 28 (Bernama) -- If there is one word to describe the voting trend in Sabah in the country's 10th general election tomorrow, it is "continuity".

The Barisan Nasional (BN) is clearly ahead in at least 12 of the 20 parliamentary seats in Sabah and is also set to retain Labuan. Sabah held its state election earlier this year.

In the last election, the BN won Labuan and 10 of the 20 parliamentary seats in Sabah and there is a strong signal that the ruling coalition is making inroads in several opposition-held areas this time.

The BN is aiming to win more than 16 seats in Sabah to be among the biggest contributors to a BN victory nationwide.

In Papar, Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam, who won the seat with a 3,116-majority in 1995, is too strong for Parti Bersatu Sabah's (PBS) Mohamed Saidi Lampoh, a veteran politician who once served as an assemblyman in the Berjaya government.

Apart from Osu, the other BN incumbents expected to be returned are Datuk Salleh Tun Said (Kota Belud), Datuk Shafie Apdal (Semporna), Datuk Railey Jeffrey (Silam), Datuk Dr Yusof Yacob (Sipitang), Lau Ngan Siew (Sandakan) and Datuk Amirkahar Tun Mustapha (Marudu).

Former chief minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee is also having a good run here and is expected to retain Gaya for the BN.

Other "white areas" for BN are Libaran, Kinabatangan, Tawau and Beaufort.

History may also repeat itself in the Chinese-dominated area of Sandakan in favour of the BN. Challenging the BN incumbent Lau Ngan Siew are Sak Cheong Yu (PBS) and a former DAP MP, Fung Ket Wing, who is now with the Malaysian Democratic Party (MDP).

Sak and Fung are both said to have substantial following there and a split in votes among the opposition sympathisers seemed inevitable again.

A neck-and-neck fight is expected in Beluran, Kinabalu, Tuaran and Tenom. The BN, with its better-organised machinery, has the upperhand in Kinabalu and Tuaran, both Kadazandusun seats.

"If the BN can keep the momentum, BN is well on its way to wresting Kinabalu and Tuaran," noted an observer.

In Beluran, the BN had to put in a lot of hard work although it had emerged the winner in 1995. This is because in the March state election, the PBS managed to get a comfortable majority in Labuk, one of the two state seats under Beluran, while the BN won Sugut, the other state seat, with a small majority.

The PBS looks strong to retain its strongholds of Keningau, Bandau and Penampang, all of which are Kadazandusun-dominated areas, and Tanjung Aru, a Chinese-dominated seat.

Analysts said that if the BN can threaten the PBS in any of the four areas, it would have to be Penampang due to the considerable shift in support in favour of BN and also to the huge number of Muslim bumiputeras and Chinese voters who are mostly BN supporters.

"We can win up to 16 seats in Sabah and maybe more...if we cannot win in certain opposition areas, we will certainly reduce their majority," said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

-- BERNAMA

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