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BN, PBS and Bersekutu all confident of forming next government

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BARISAN Nasional is confident of an outright win in the March 12-13, State election to continue to be at the helm of the State Government for another five years. Also expressing confidence is Opposition Parti Bersatu Sabah.

Both said they could secure enough seats to form the next State Government. For the predominantly Kadazan PBS, this means wresting power from the ruling coalition.

Yet another Opposition party, Barisan Rakyat Sabah Bersekutu is confident of victory in all the 48 seats and forming the State Government after the polls. Although relatively new, being formed in 1990, Bersekutu is claiming to have wide support.

When nomination closed Tuesday, these three parties fielded candidates in all the 48 seats up for grabs in this ninth election for State seats.

Also joining the fray are Setia (21 candidates), Pas (six) and Pasok (one) while 27 others are independents. Collectively, they have paid RM597,000 in deposits. Some of these hopefuls could lose their deposits if they fail to garner votes equal to at least one-third of votes obtained by the winning candidate.

It's the BN, PBS and Bersekutu's right to claim victory but at the end of the day, the mandate will have to come from the 726,690 voters.

"The list is out (names of candidates). Now it is for the people to decide who they want," Gilbert Liaw, a branch chairman of a BN component party said.

State BN chairman and Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok had on the dissolution of the State Legislative Assembly said it was up to the people to decide which party they want to be the State Government.

Dompok, who heads Parti Demokratik Sabah, said with the BN's proven track record, the State coalition of nine parties would get the support of the people to stay in power. Other BN components are Umno, Liberal Democratic Party, Sabah Progressive Party, Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah, MCA, Gerakan and MIC.

The confidence showed by the Sabah BN comes partly from the high profile support of national BN leaders who are now in Sabah helping in the campaigns. In fact, a big boost is also seen in the presence of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who had just returned from a successful D8 meeting in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The presence of these national leaders show the level of importance they attach to Sabah. Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has also been flying in and out of Sabah to lend whatever support to the local stalwarts.

Among the Opposition, PBS led by Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan who is defending his Tambunan seat, said the people's support for PBS this time around was stronger than in previous elections.

"PBS will win enough seats, more than two-thirds majority to form a stable State Government," Pairin declared.

Another member of the Opposition, Datuk Harris Salleh said Bersekutu would emerge victorious in all the 48 seats "as the people understand our struggle to try to bring progress to Sabah".

Even before polling, Harris had expressed confidence of winning in Likas where he faces another former Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee, of the Sabah Progressive Party, another BN component.

Harris is sure that his party will win easily in Inanam, a predominantly

Chinese area where Bersekutu has a Chinese candidate, and Kuala Penyu, Labuk and Kuamut, which are Muslim areas.

Seeing the political development from a distance, Taipin Ukun a businessman from Kampung Nukakatan in Tambunan said it would not be difficult for the people to decide who and which party to support.

He said the people had seen the State managed by Pairin (1985-1994), Harris (1976-1985) and the BN Government since 1994.

"If the people want continued progress and the State to develop further, there's no other choice but the BN. Voting for the Opposition will not be in the best interest of the people and Sabah," he said.

Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah strongman Cyril Yansalang said it would be a big mistake for the people to support the Opposition.

He said a State constituency represented by an Opposition assemblyman would not get the RM500,000 annual allocation from the State Government for minor projects for the people.

PDS supreme council member Petrus Francis Guriting who is taking on Pairin for the Tambunan seat said BN was the only hope for the people to step into the mainstream of development.

As of yesterday, only the BN, PBS and Bersekutu had unveiled their manifestos for the election.

BN's manifesto 'Building The Future Together' spells out its development agenda with a commitment to make the people and Sabah more competitive in facing the challenges of the next century.

PBS manifesto themed 'Unite to Save Sabah' commits the party to the defence of Sabah's rights, abolish the rotation of the Chief Minister's post and formulation of a new anti-hop law, among others.

Bersekutu promises the people of Sabah, among others, a RM300 financial reward to each Sabahan aged 21 years and above as well as free education for the next 10 years.

The people of Sabah can now weigh the pros and cons of all the arguments and choose the leaders who will lead Sabah into the next millennium.

Their future and the future of their children depend on them making the right decision between committed leaders and opportunists with narrow interests.

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