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Come out in full force, voters urged

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KOTA KINABALU, Thurs. - Sabah goes to the polls tomorrow. And today, leaders of the three main contending parties aiming to form the next State Government made final efforts to woo voters.

Leaders of the three parties - Barisan Nasional, Parti Bersatu Sabah and Parti Bersekutu - called on voters to come out in full force to cast their ballots.

Leading the call was Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who flew by helicopter to Kudat this morning to address a meet-the-people session.

The gathering was organised in support of the three BN candidates in the area - Datuk Chong Kah Kiat (Kudat), Datuk Amirkahar Tun Mustapha (Banggi) and Datuk Markus Majihi (Matunggong).

The Prime Minister and BN chairman advised voters to come out in full force to exercise their democratic right to pick the next State Government.

"I believe the voters are wise enough to vote for the BN because of its proven track record," Dr Mahathir said, reiterating the need for Sabah to be governed by a party which is in power at the Federal level.

He pledged to ensure that BN candidates who won in the election work hard for the people.

In the afternoon, the Prime Minister went on the air to address a meet-the-people session in Ranau after poor weather prevented him from flying there by helicopter.

Not to be outdone, PBS president Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan, who had been touring the Muslim-majority constituencies over the last three days, today travelled to the non-Muslim-majority constituencies of Kemabong, Melalap, Bingkor and Pensiangan.

Advising voters to reject the BN which he claimed had failed to fulfil many of its 1994 election promises, Pairin, in one ceramah, said voters should cast their ballots early.

Acting Parti Bersekutu president Datuk Harris Salleh, who had boldly predicted a landslide victory for his party, advised voters to come in droves on polling day.

The BN, PBS and Parti Bersekutu are the only parties which have prospects of forming the next State Government as they are contesting in all 48 constituencies.

The other parties contesting the polls are Parti Setia (21), Pas (six) and Pasok (one). Also in the fray are 27 independents.

Polling will be held over two days with 19,814 of the 726,690 registered voters casting their ballots at 64 polling stations in six of the 48 State constituencies tomorrow.

The six constituencies are Banggi, Sindumin, Pensiangan, Sugut, Kuamut and Kalabakan.

State election officer Abdul Hamid Ali said of the six, Banggi was the only constituency which would complete polling tomorrow while the other five constituencies would see polling on Saturday as well.

He said the remaining 693,580 voters would cast their ballots on Saturday at 544 polling stations.

Abdul Hamid added that the 13,296 postal voters, who began casting their votes last Saturday, were still voting and would probably continue to do so until Saturday.

"We will know the results for Banggi by tomorrow but we will release

them along with those of other constituencies after polling ends on Saturday."

"At present, everything is under control and we expect polling to go on smoothly," he said.

The Election Commission is using 10 Sabah Air helicopters to assist in tallying results from remote areas.

Based on the 1998 electoral roll, there are 726,690 registered voters, an increase of 128,378 voters compared to 598,312 in the 1994 State election.