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Sabah-Kadazandusuns (News Analysis)
KADAZANDUSUNS BIGGEST LOSERS IN SABAH POLLS

By: Eddy Lok

KOTA KINABALU, March 13 (Bernama) -- The Kadazandusuns are the biggest losers in the just-ended Sabah state election - they lost Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok and all but two of the 16 Kadazandusun Barisan Nasional (BN) candidates.

The community largely rejected the Kadazandusun candidates from the ruling coalition and continued to rally behind the opposition Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) led by Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan whom they regard as their Huguang Siou (paramount chief).

The BN won 31 seats and the PBS 17.

With the PBS sitting it out as the opposition, the community's representation in the newly-returned BN government is now very much weaker.

Besides Dompok, who is president of Parti Demokratik Sabah (PDS), the other casualties among BN Kadazandusun leaders are Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Kurup and Datuk Wilfred Bumburing.

Kurup is president of Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS) and Bumburing is PDS deputy president.

The two BN candidates from the community, the state's largest, who made it are Datuk Siringan Gubat in Ranau and Datuk Wences Angang in Kuala Penyu.

The immediate question now is who would be the Kadazandusun leader to replace Dompok as the non-Muslim bumiputera Chief Minister under the rotation system.

Dompok's term still had more than one year to go.

Or, would the Prime Minister and BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad end the rotation system now that the Kadazandusuns had rejected Dompok and most of the PDS candidates standing on the BN platform.

Dr Mahathir, in his first comments on the BN victory at his residence in Kuala Lumpur, said the rotation system would be retained and that he would consult Dompok and the other leaders as to who to appoint as the new Chief Minister.

Political sources here said a possible scenario is that the Kadazandusun's term under the system could be shortened and if this happens, the chief minister's post would likely go to Sabah Umno chief Datuk Osu Sukam, who retained his Kawang seat handsomely.

But for the community, they have lost a Chief Minister in Dompok and Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) president Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan unable to form the government as the PBS won only 17 of the 48 seats.

Pairin had expressed confidence of winning the election but several areas fell to BN, partly due to split votes caused by the other opposition Parti Bersekutu.

He also blamed the losses on the redelineation of electoral boundaries which reduced the number of Kadazandusun-majority seats.

Dompok on his part, has pledged to quit politics if he lost in his bid to win re-election.

Kadazandusun representation in the new state government may be increased if for instance, the ruling party decides to nominate some from among the community to fill the six nominated assembly member positions.

A possibility that looms large over the 17 elected PBS assemblymen, especially its Kadazandusun representatives, is whether they would be tempted to cross over to the BN just like in 1994.

Will there be a repeat of 1994? Only time will tell.

For now, the Kadazandusuns must be content with being a strong opposition in the State Legislative Assembly.

The executive director of a Kadazandusun think-tank, Wilfred Tanggau, the Kadazandusuns had been put at a crossroad by this election - cooperate with the BN or be sidelined.

Sabah Muslims have had a very consistent voting pattern, almost always throwing their support behind a Muslim-based party with the exception of the elections in 1976 and 1981 in which they backed the multi-racial Berjaya.

Dr Yaakub Johari, the executive director of the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), another Sabah think-tank, said a few days before the polls that he did not think the Kadazandusuns would abandon their "sentimental attachment" to PBS and Pairin.

"The Kadazandusuns realise that it doesn't pay for them to vote for the opposition but at the same time they won't abandon their Huguan Siou," he said.

Of the 12 constituencies with Kadazandusun majority, PBS lost two - Ranau and Kemabong - but it won in five seats with Chinese and mixed electorates.

--BERNAMA

EL THG