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Sabah-Players

SIX MAJOR PLAYERS IN SABAH POLLS

KOTA KINABALU, March 8 (Bernama) -- Among the 199 candidates in the ninth Sabah state election on Friday and Saturday, there are at least six major players from three main parties - Barisan Nasional (BN), Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) and Bersekutu.

For some of them, the competition in their respective constituencies is so intense and the stakes are so high that they are seen to be involved in a do or die battle.

The six players are:

++ TAN SRI BERNARD DOMPOK

Dompok is the current Chief Minister of Sabah and president of Parti Demokratik Sabah (PDS) which he formed after leaving PBS following the 1994 state election. He is seeking re-election in the predominantly Kadazandusun Moyog constituency.

Dompok, who has been the assemblyman for Moyog - one of the 48 state constituencies - since 1986 when he first won the seat on a PBS ticket, faces five other candidates in this election.

Now aged 50, he first became chief minister in May 1998, under the BN's system of rotation of the chief minister's post.

He has expressed confidence of winning the seat again, but publicly declared he will quit politics if the 22,616 Moyog constituents fail to return him.

The Kadazandusun community stands to lose having one of their own in the chief minister's seat if Dompok loses Moyog and if his former boss Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan's Kadazandusun-based PBS fails to form the government.

Dompok, who has a Bachelor of Science degree in Land Administration, was a Member of Parliament in Penampang from 1986 until he was defeated in the 1995 federal election.

His PDS has candidates in 12 constituencies, mostly with a large Kadazandusun population.

++ DATUK YONG TECK LEE

A former chief minister under the rotation system, he is defending the affluent Likas constituency against another former chief minister, Datuk Harris Salleh, and four others.

Yong, who is president of the Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) which has fielded candidates in five areas, is a four-term assemblyman for Likas.

A lawyer by training, Yong spent many years in PBS, first winning the seat for the party in 1985, the year when PBS toppled the Berjaya government. The now defunct party was then led by Harris.

Just before the 1994 state election, he left PBS to form SAPP which succeeded in winning several Chinese seats for the BN.

He has been asked by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Abdullah Badawi to work harder to win re-election for the Likas seat.

++ DATUK OSU HAJI SUKAM

The Sabah Umno Liaison Committee Chairman is defending the Kawang seat which he won narrowly in the last state election.

Osu was deputy chief minister and state finance minister prior to the dissolution of the State Legislative Assembly, and he is expected to be

appointed the next chief minister after Tan Sri Bernard Dompok has served his two-year tenure under the rotation system.

He and Dompok are heading the State BN operations in the election.

Osu has been the Federal Minister of Land and Cooperatives Development, prior to returning to state politics and heading the State Umno.

He was a leader in the now de-registered Usno which once ruled Sabah under the late "Sabah's father of independence" Tun Datu Mustapha Datu Harun.

++ DATUK HARRIS MOHD SALLEH

At 68, former Chief Minister Harris, is making his second attempt to return to power after his former party, Berjaya, was defeated in the 1985 state election by then infant PBS.

He now heads Bersekutu which is contesting in all the 48 state constituencies. He himself is standing in the urban Likas constituency where he lives.

Harris, who was appointed the sixth chief minister in June 1976, ruled Sabah under Berjaya for nine and a half years.

He has spoken about forming the next government, basing his 'optimism' on his track records on development and socio-political stability which was experienced by the state while he was in power.

Harris, who enjoyed good relations with Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he was chief minister, has now been described by the prime minister as a spoiler in the election.

Harris studied law in London, and has been an MP before. He does not favour the rotation system and has claimed that he would be in the best position to tackle the current economic malaise affecting the state.

++ DATUK JOSEPH PAIRIN KITINGAN

Reagarded as the Huoguan Siou or the paramount chief by Kadazandusuns, Pairin, 59, was one of the longest-serving chief ministers of Sabah until he resigned in the wake of the 1994 state election which saw a series of defections to BN from among his elected assemblymen.

Pairin is the president of PBS which is contesting in all the 48 constituencies. Confident of returning to power, his campaigners have begun referring to PBS as 'Parti Berkuasa Semula'.

Pairin who has been the assemblyman for Tambunan for several terms since Berjaya's days, is defending the seat against three others. Having the edge as the Huoguan Siou, he is expected to win comfortably again by most political observers.

Of the 11,086 eligible voters in the constituency, 10,058 or more than 90 per cent are Kadazandusuns.

Trained as a lawyer, Pairin does not enjoy a good relationship with the federal government.

++ DATUK CHONG KAH KIAT

Chong, who recently resigned as a minister in the Prime Minister's Department, is contesting the Kudat seat again, having been the assemblyman there before during Berjaya's rule.

This time, Chong, 51, who is the president of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), one of the nine components of the Sabah BN, faces three others in the mixed constituency, situated in the north-eastern tip of Sabah.

He is one of two LDP candidates in this election, the other being vice president Wong Lien Tat who is contesting the Karamunting seat against three others.

Like the other Chinese-based parties, Chong's LDP is competing for the support of the 300,000-odd Chinese in the state. There are 142,801 Chinese

with voting rights.

In the 1995 general election, Chong, a lawyer by training, was defeated in the Marudu parliamentary seat by Datu Amir Kahar Tun Datu Mustapha who stood on a PBS ticket. Amir Kahar is now in Umno and is contesting on a BN ticket for Banggi state seat.

Chong, who was appointed a senator and made a federal minister in June 1995, is confident he will win the Kudat seat for BN.

-- BERNAMA

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