

Barisan top brass head for Sarawak

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By STEPHEN THEN

MIRI: Federal Cabinet members and Barisan Nasional leaders are making a beeline for Sarawak as the Barisan election machinery shifts into high gear for the coming elections.

MCA president and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, for instance, arrived yesterday for a four-day visit to Kuching, Long Akah, Long Lelang, Bario, Pa'Dallih, Ba'Kelalan highlands, Long Seridan, Sibü and here.

He met Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud and other senior state leaders in Kuching before having dinner with top political and business leaders here.

Today, Dr Ling is flying into the rural regions of northern Sarawak to open airports there.

He will be hopping from one interior settlement to another via helicopter, accompanied by several state leaders and assemblymen, and a delegation from Malaysia Airlines and the Department of Civil Aviation.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will arrive in Sibü today at 6pm to launch the 18th National Chinese Cultural Festival.

The massive celebrations, expected to start at 7.30pm at the town square, will see some 5,000 people from all walks of life witnessing the colourful event.

Abdullah will be accompanied by Taib and several senior state leaders. Also expected to be present are leaders of Chinese asso-

ciations, business groups and ethnic clans.

Abdullah's visit will be short, but his presence is seen as meaningful and important.

Sibü is expected to see a keen tussle between the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) and the DAP in the polls.

SUPP lost the Bukit Assek and Padawan constituencies to the DAP in 1996.

Also expected to visit Sarawak later this month is the Prime Minister and Barisan chairman himself.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is expected to visit Kuching and the central region.

Sometime next week, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak is expected to visit Sibü for a dialogue with members of the armed forces and the ex-servicemen association.

He is also scheduled to meet personnel at several army camps in the division.

MIC president and Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu has also been invited to visit Limbang in the northernmost tip of Sarawak although his schedule has yet to be confirmed.

These top national leaders are expected to deliver to Sarawakians a common message: To maintain the racial unity and social and economic progress that has been successfully achieved by the Barisan component parties in the state thus far.

The state polls will have to be held within the next two months.