

The people of Sarawak have spoken

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Presence of Opposition parties hardly felt

By Ashraf Abdullah

KUCHING, Thurs. The people of Sarawak have once again spoken.

They have returned the Barisan Nasional Government to power with a landslide victory in today's eighth State elections.

The presence of Opposition parties Pas, Parti Keadilan Nasional and State Reform Party — all making their debut in this year's election, was hardly felt.

They lost all the seats contested and promptly shown the exit.

The DAP performed below par, securing only the Kidurong seat through Chew Chiu Sing.

The party had won three seats in the 1996 election.

Even Opposition political heavyweights, Star president Dr Patau Rubis, incumbent Wong Ho Leng, who is state DAP chairman lost in Bengoh and Bukit Assek, respectively.

Bujang Ulis, the former Deputy Education Minister who contested on a Keadilan ticket, lost in the Simunjan constituency although many expected him to win.

Pas State commissioner Mohamad Shokri Ahmad Fauzi lost in Samariang.

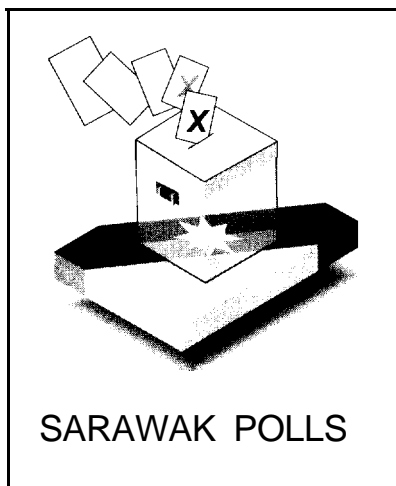
It was obvious that the people of Sarawak voted for continuity.

Only the BN had the track record of bringing progress to the State, and the country as a whole.

The results of last night's State election bore testimony of the people's preference for BN's development politics.

Themed "Moving Together for a Progressive Sarawak", the 20-point RN manifesto was more attractive than the rest.

It puts the State Government's vision into motion, aiming to bring about a balanced development fo-



cusings not only on the economy but also the social aspects.

The BN had also pledged to diversify and strengthen the State's economy to provide more employment opportunities for the people and in the process, developing a knowledge society which would make life-long learning a way of life.

It would also fulfil some of the pledges made in the last State election which had to be deferred following the regional financial crisis which hit the nation, as well as other Asian countries in 1997.

The fate of neighbouring Sabah, which took a few steps backward during the rule of Parti Bersatu Sabah and now struggling to regain its past glory, was the other factor that voters in Sarawak considered before casting their votes.

The people have shown that there was no place in Sarawak for the Opposition's gung-ho politics.

While Keadilan was known for organising gatherings which more often than not turned unruly, some

Pas members were allegedly members of militant groups, including the Kumpulan Militan Malaysia which in turn was believed to be linked to the Taliban.

Pas members were even told to keep out of the longhouses in Sading Jaya — one of the three constituencies it contested in the State elections.

Apparently, the longhouse residents were upset because the Pas members had called their Muslim friends *kafir* (infidels).

Such an attitude did not go down well with the constituents, especially because it came from a party contesting the election for the first time.

In his one-day campaign trail for the BN on Monday, its chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad appealed to the Sarawak people to reject the Opposition's aggressive campaign tactics.

The Prime Minister even went to the extent of appealing to BN voters to stay back at the voting centres after they had cast their ballots.

This, he said, will prevent Opposition members from trying to scare BN voters away.

Dr Mahathir was obviously referring to the Lunas by-election experience where Opposition members tried to keep BN supporters from casting their votes.

They even stopped BN campaigners from entering certain areas to meet voters.

If gauging their popularity in Sarawak was their intention, it was a lesson well learnt for the Opposition.

Pas, Keadilan, Star, DAP and the independent candidates were rejected outright.