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Despite the track record, candidates have to work hard

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THE presence of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Sibul and Kuching today is expected to boost the prospects of the Barisan Nasional candidates in the State election.

With three days to go before polling day, political parties in Sarawak are drawing every card in the deck in a last-minute effort to gain support.

Though the atmosphere around town - according to the man in the street - is not like in previous years where scores of posters lined the streets and ceramah was held almost every night, party leaders feel they have to work extra hard this time to win the support of the people.

Even the BN parties feel they face an uphill task despite a proven track record.

Ceramah and posters alone can no longer get the message across, so most candidates have turned to door-to-door campaigning for the personal touch which is more effective.

The DAP's withdrawal from the Opposition coalition adds a new twist to the election, especially in Chinese-majority areas such as Bukit Assek and Pelawan which are known DAP strongholds.

Despite efforts by the Sarawak DAP to convince the people that the party is independent and has no alliance with the coalition, there exists a fear over Pas' intention to form an Islamic state if the Opposition coalition comes to power.

The people do not seem convinced of DAP's independence. They feel support for it in the Chinese community has since waned and it will take much effort to regain their trust.

As for Keadilan, recent incidents such as the resignation of 250 members in the Sibul division and the statement by former division chairman Abdul Hajis Abdullah that the party was without focus, have derailed its efforts to make headway in the State.

Even the Independents are not regarded as a serious threat to the BN, as people feel voting for an Independent is as good as not having a representative, considering he does not have the backing or resources to give them what they want.

Despite these setbacks to the Opposition, the BN parties cannot take anything for granted. Allegations by the Opposition have caused confusion among voters.

Most people seem to think the BN will make a clean sweep. Even in Opposition strongholds, the winds of change are sweeping through as the people become hungry for development.

The response to the BN door-to-door campaigning is encouraging while the "meet-the-people" sessions have been overwhelming.

But one should not overlook the large crowds at DAP's ceramah in the last few nights. Many say it was curious people who were amused by the speeches which often contained "interesting" allegations against BN candidates.

The BN should tread cautiously and pay more attention to Opposition strongholds.

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