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Tattered Opposition makes BN confident of big sweep in Sarawak

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ONE can hardly blame the Sarawak Barisan Nasional for confidently expecting another "big sweep" - the State Election is just round the corner and the Opposition is still in disarray.

The DAP, which is only influential in Sibu, stepped on Keadilan's toes when its state chairman Wong Ho Leng, who is State Assemblyman for Bukit Assek, announced that his party would contest in 13 seats - without consulting Keadilan.

For instance, it is believed that Keadilan was interested in the Padungan seat where its Stampin Branch secretary Dominique Ng Kim Ho, an ex-DAP member, was tipped to stand. But DAP, it seems, has other plans and wants its State secretary Chong Chieng Jen for Padungan.

Other constituencies listed by Wong are Batu Lintang, Tanjung Datu, Pelawan, Bukit Assek, Dudong, Bawang Assan, Maradong, Repok, Kidurong, Kemena, Piasau and Senadin.

DAP national chairman Lim Kit Siang has given Sarawak DAP the authority to decide the seats it wants to contest. Lim said it was also up to the State DAP to decide whether to negotiate with Keadilan on the distribution of seats.

In the 1996 polls, DAP won Bukit Assek, Pelawan and Kidurong but it is left with only Bukit Assek after Kidurong assemblyman Wong Sing Ai lost to BN in a by-election, and Pelawan assemblyman Jason Wong Sing Nang resigned from the party to become an independent.

Keadilan's state liaison Youth chief Zulrosdi Mohamed Hol said there had been meetings among the various opposition parties such as Pas, STAR and Keadilan.

A former bank officer, Zulrosdi, 33, said preparations were going smoothly and that Keadilan was campaigning from house to house after failing to obtain police permits to hold ceramahs. He claims that Keadilan has about 20,000 registered members and that thousands attend its gatherings.

"Keadilan has made its presence felt from Lundu to Lawas and even in the remote areas such as Kapit, Belaga, Ba Kelalan, Ulu Skrang and Ulu Batang Lupar," he said.

Keadilan has also been stirring up issues on land acquisition, nepotism, cronyism, corruption and non-transparency.

"Only a few hands are getting projects, and several projects such as Miri Port and the Bakun Dam are white elephants," said Zulrosdi.

He claimed that those who were affected by the RM9 billion Bakun hydro-electric project received inadequate compensation.

But Bakun Resettlement Committee chairman Datuk Dr James Jemut Masing, who handed over compensation totalling RM8.050 million to 425 residents from 16 longhouses at the Sungai Asap resettlement scheme recently said the biggest amount paid was RM1.214 million while the smallest was RM65,000.

Dr Masing is also the State Social Development and Urbanisation Minister, and the assemblyman for Baleh.

Housing and Local Government Deputy Minister Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui dismissed Keadilan's chances.

"Keadilan will not win a single seat in Sarawak as Sarawakians cannot accept its style and politics. It harps on national issues which has little to do with the situation in the State," he said.

Serdang assemblyman Datuk Mohamad Asfia Awang Nassar, who is also the Speaker, has cautioned Bumiputera voters in the Central Region comprising Sibu, Sarikei and Kapit Divisions against allowing Opposition parties like Pas and Keadilan to gain a foothold here.

"The objectives and struggles of both parties are not only irrelevant but also impractical," he said.

STAR (State Reform Party) president and one-time BN Maverick Dr Patau Rubis hopes to see a contest for all 62 seats.

He said he still subscribes to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's concept of Bersih, Cekap dan Amanah.

STAR has also been busy exploiting the fears and grievances of the Dayak community over the Native Customary Rights (NCR) land issue.

BN leaders have moved fast to neutralise the issue with the State Government issuing land titles and paying compensation for land acquired for public purposes and development.

Agriculture and Food Industries Minister Dato Adenan Satem said the Government had proved its sincerity and commitment to increase the profitability of land in various kampungs by issuing more land titles to owners.

He said the titles would ensure that land owners had the certainty of ownership over their land which they could put to good commercial use.

The BN will also have to contend with the group of independents led by former Defence Minister Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha who has announced that they will be standing in 45 constituencies. A former deputy president of Parti Pesaka Bumiputra Bersatu (PBB), Abang Abu left the party last year.

Despite being rebuffed by several top Umno leaders, Abang Abu said the group had not given up on their attempts to bring Umno to Sarawak.

"If our candidates win and we form the State Government, and if by then Umno is prepared to extend its wings to Sarawak, we and thousands of Umno supporters here will welcome Umno with open arms," he said.

The issue of Umno's entry into Sarawak, he said, would be "a hidden agenda" for many voters this time. The NCR land issue and the privatisation of projects under the Public Works Department and the Land and Survey Department have also formed the thrust of the group's campaigning.

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