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Sabah-Election (News Analysis)

THE CLOCK IS TICKING AWAY FOR SABAH ELECTION COUNTDOWN

By: Jackson Sawatan

KOTA KINABALU, June 15 (Bernama) -- In 11 months from now, the coming Sabah state election would have been over and the new state cabinet -- of the Barisan Nasional (BN) government, that is, going by the latest political trend -- would have been sworn-in.

This is how close Sabah is to calling for its 10th state election since independence.

Some political observers predicted that the election will be held "somewhere in or after September but it is definitely going to be this year" but others are unconvinced, preferring to go by convention.

And by convention they meant that the election would likely be held in February next year, going by the time the two previous state elections were held, which was in February 1994 and February 1999.

Every now and then the question on the timing of the election was asked but definite answers are not forthcoming, thus fuelling further the talks and speculations pertaining to the polls.

Chief Minister and Sabah BN chairman Datuk Musa Aman has said that the matter would be discussed with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who is BN chairman.

"We will consider an appropriate date," said Musa of the state election, which must be called at the latest by April 12 next year, which is less than 10 months from now.

Sixty state seats are at stake, including 12 new ones under the recent redelineation of election boundaries.

According to several party workers met by Bernama, of these seats, 34 are for Muslim Bumiputeras, 17 for the non-Muslim Bumiputeras, six for the Chinese and three mixed areas.

Official figures are not available yet, they said, as the Election Commission (EC) was still finalising the list and only after that will political parties be able to compute a more accurate racial composition of each constituency.

"We expect to be able to obtain the list by next month...we were made to understand that it should be ready by then," said a party worker.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty over the polls date, political parties from the ruling coalition had long been on the ground to make early preparations, so has the opposition, particularly Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Nunuk Ragang Bersatu (Pasok) which has been doing active over the past few months across the state.

The election machinery of component parties of the ruling coalition had been activated and campaign to increase membership and to register new voters is being intensified.

Despite the BN being the overwhelming favourite to register a clean sweep of all the seats at stake, Sabah BN secretary Datuk Karim Bujang said that the ruling coalition would not take anything for granted.

On the possibility of an intense lobbying for seat allocations among individuals and members of the state BN component parties, Karim said that what was important was for the spirit cooperation in the BN to be given priority.

Besides the date of the election, the talk of the town also centred on whether the state election would be held separately or simultaneously with the national election.

Also a hot favourite is the issue of whether the state election is to

be held before or after October, the month when Dr Mahathir leaves office.

"A BN clean sweep in the election will be a nice present to the Prime Minister before he retires and also a nice welcome for his successor Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi," said a divisional leader of a BN component party.

Whatever the date maybe, it's all system go for the BN.

As for the opposition, comprising several parties, nothing seemed to have been finalised yet except for their general readiness to field candidate in all 60 constituencies, preferably on a straight fight with the BN.

How the oppositions works out a compromise, remains to be seen.

As the saying goes, they will cross the bridge when they come to it. Or will they double-cross?

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