

'BN could lose more than half of Sabah seats'

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By Aidila Razak

The BN stands to lose more than 60 percent of its parliamentary seats in Sabah in the next general election, said a Sabah-based political scientist.

UiTM Sabah lecturer Arnold Puyok said that, based on his research, BN could lose up to 14 of the 22 seats now held by BN in the state.

Seats like Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan and Pensiangan are being considered "easy wins" for the opposition.

"I don't think the 'fixed deposit' will remain," he said, referring to the popular term for Sabah and Sarawak, which have been traditional BN strongholds.

He was speaking at a roundtable discussion on the next general election, organised by the politics, security and international relations cluster of the National Professors' Council.

Puyok said the BN will have difficulty in retaining not only Chinese seats in Sabah, but also areas where the Kadazan-Dusun make up the majority of voters.

"BN could lose up to 10 marginal areas (where the) Kadazan-Dusun (make up the) majority (of) voters," he said, noting that the toughest battles will be seen in areas which are more urban and densely populated.

He predicted a "tripartite" battle in Sabah between the BN, the United Borneo Front led by veteran Sabah politician Jeffrey Kitingan and an alliance between Pakatan Rakyat and a local movement.

The local movement he said, is likely to be Angkatan Perubahan Sabah, led by local politicians like Beaufort and Tuaran MPs Lajim Ukin and Wilfred Bumburing, who are rumoured to be leaving the BN.

However, he posited that Lajim and Bumburing, both political strongmen in the 1970s and 1980s, have little traction outside their areas today.

"People still look at (Joseph) Pairin (Kitingan,) as a source to unite the Kadazan-Dusun, and I don't see (Bumburing shifting) support from BN to the opposition," he said.

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak political scientist Jeneri Amir said that, while Sarawak BN anchor party PBB is likely to win all 14 of its seats, the same cannot be said for its partners.

"PRS has six seats, but the Sarawak Workers Party is planning to contest four of these and is likely to win two... ," he said.

"SUPP is in bigger trouble, and is likely to lose five of its seven seats as the perception among the Chinese is that a vote for SUPP is a vote for (Sarawak Chief Minister) Abdul Taib Mahmud."

SPDP, he said, is also in trouble due to recent defections.

The 2011 Sarawak election has shown popular vote for BN dropping by close to 10 percent compared to the 2006 state polls, he added.

'Sabah, Sarawak kept Umno afloat'

UPM lecturer Jayum Jawan said the question is no longer whether the Borneo states are fixed deposits, but rather a "floatation device (pelampung) to keep Umno and Malays from sinking".

"In 1963, when Singapore left Malaysia, in 1969 when the ruling coalition lost its two-third majority and were fearful even though in other countries people could rule with much less than that...and again in 2008," he said, listing the instances when the two states had provided support.

"In 2013, when the parliamentary term is over, I don't know if Sabah and Sarawak will be a floatation device for any battle ship."

Jawan added that, in Sabah and Sarawak, the church is the "third force" with its strong network throughout the states.

"Christians are voters too and have their interests...The church was previously only concerned in the hereafter but now they are concerned in the 'herenow'.

"Whether this will affect the next general election we will see, but it will definitely be a strong factor in Sarawak politics henceforth."

He said the people of Sarawak are feeling that they are not in the mainstream of development and when someone comes along promising change, it is very appealing.

"This cannot be taken lightly. The opposition can offer the moon and the stars, that is their job, and the job of the government (of the day) is to deliver on its promises," he added.