

DAP's slow momentum picking-up in SibU

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ANALYSIS SIBU Once the focus of the battleground in the 2010 by-election and the 2011 state elections, SibU, the third biggest town in Sarawak, seems to have lost its "shine", where the election mood and momentum has been slow on the ground for DAP.

The party appeared to be slower if compared with its opponent - the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) - in terms of election machinery and ceramah crowd response.

On the first day of the campaign, DAP's ceramah held near its SibU headquarters was only able to attract 1,000 people, while SUPP's ceramah has a strong crowd of 1,500, far better than during the state elections where it had a poor crowd size of 150 for one of its night ceramah.

At SUPP's ceramah, rounds and rounds of applause followed by whistles were heard, while at DAP's ceramah only a few people seemed to respond passionately with cheers and applause, while the rest just listened quietly and remained motionless.

SUPP's machinery has come out with new and creative ideas to attract the crowd, and its Lanang candidate Tiong Thai King and SibU candidate Vincent Lau even danced on the stage, in an attempt to woo the first-time and young voters.

SUPP's supporters have turned their ceramah into a fans gathering, where the elderly and children were spotted carrying posters featuring cartoon designs of both candidates to show their affection toward them.

The poster featured the words 'It's you, Ming Ming (Vincent Lau Lee Ming)', 'Ah Thai (Tiong), we love you'.

Even on the second day, banners, flags and posters of DAP's candidates - Alice Lau for Lanang and Oscar Ling for SibU - were barely seen.

Local voter Lee Kok Chung noted that SibU has been less passionate towards DAP as this time around, the all-out Pakatan machinery and heavyweights were absent.

Lee also said he barely knew the two new candidates DAP has fielded, compared to Tiong, a four-term parliamentarian and Lau, a prominent figure in business and the local community.

This has raises concern whether the local DAP would be able to retain its previous results on its own, given the situation that SUPP has gone all out to reclaim Sibü and defend Lanang, especially since both DAP candidate have less personal fame than SUPP's candidates.

'SUPP now has the upper hand'

Sibü SUPP chief Wong Soon Koh confidently said given the strong crowd that SUPP is drawing, Sibü and Lanang is within its reach, and the party now has the upper hand.

Sarawak DAP chief and incumbent Sibü parliamentarian Wong Ho Leng admitted the slowing momentum in Sibü, but said it would not be a problem for DAP to defend Sibü and claim Lanang.

"We can manage on our own," he answered when asked if the top leaders were needed in Sibü to secure victory, adding that the party can win with or without the heavyweight leaders.

"Frankly speaking, given the fact of the absence of the top leaders, it's not bad to have such a crowd, I spent one-and-a-half hours to shake hands with them, and there are still some people I left out," said Alice.

She said she had received information that people were paid RM30 to attend the SUPP function.

"You can see massive crowds attending SUPP's ceramah, but you can't see their heart," said Raymond, a local voter.

Pakatan needs to win 10 seats in Sarawak in order to take Putrajaya. Both Sibü and Lanang have been seen as winnable targets by Pakatan.

Both seats have traditionally been SUPP strongholds, where DAP only won in Sibü in the 1982 general election and the 2010 by-election, and once took Lanang in 1990 GE.

Wong Ho Leng, who is the incumbent Sibü Parliamentarian, has won the seat with a majority of 398, but SUPP turned around the situation in the state elections a year

later, where the total votes garnered in the three state seats were 719 votes more than the opposition.

SUPP's support in Lanang appears to be fading, where although Tiong had beaten DAP candidate David Wong with a 4,864-vote majority in 2008, DAP candidates had won the two state seats under Lanang.

Guan Eng causes 2km-long jam

However, things changed with DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng's arrival in Sibu which caused a stir in Sibu, where his ceramah was attended by a 10,000-strong crowd, causing a 2km-long jam on the roads nearby.

The crowd that DAP drew was as good as the strong crowds they had drawn during the state elections.

In his speech, Lim has promised a better future for Sarawakians and that they will have a chief minister who is clean and who can make them proud, and the state will be owned by the people instead of a few families.

He urged Sarawak to become the "East Wind" for Pakatan to take Putrajaya.

Even though public support seems to have returned, it remains to be seen whether DAP can keep the heat on the ground with local machinery.

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