

## **Sabah BN plays Najib card as rivals claw one another**

**MalaysiaKini.com**

**May 2, 2013**

**By Aidila Razak**

SABAH Tensions are rising in the key swing state of Sabah as parties start clawing at one another in this final lap of the campaign for the 2013 general election.

But parties with knives out are those who share a common goal of toppling the BN, while the BN is keeping consistent message - vote for us if you want Najib Abdul Razak to remain prime minister.

All this, while peddling fear and conspiracies that have forced Pakatan Rakyat to be on the back foot into the home stretch of the race.

While the Najib card has been played by BN through ceramah and banners for several days now, public sniping between its many rivals only started in earnest this week.

Almost overnight, banners and posters viciously attacking opponents were spotted, especially around Tuaran, while a smear campaign is in full gear in Kota Kinabalu.

On Monday, both local parties - the SAPP and Star - had to go public to counter a whisper campaign alleging they had received millions from BN to split votes in favour of the ruling coalition.

SAPP's Yong 'a BN agent'

Yesterday, SAPP was also forced to lodge a police report against DAP, which it alleged was going around spreading rumours through its "red army" - a group allegedly used to tar DAP opponents in coffee shops and on social media.

The SAPP, led by its Luyang candidate Melanie Chia, even fingered DAP's Likas candidate Junz Wong for leading the smear campaign, which include claims that SAPP received RM80 million from BN.

NONEWhile unwilling to butt heads with SAPP earlier in the 15-day campaign, DAP changed tracks when its Kapayan candidate Edwin Bosi accused SAPP president Yong Teck Lee (right in photo) of having been an agent for BN as early as the Batu Sapi by-election in 2011.

"At that point, the opposition was winning many by-elections so the government of

Sabah was worried and felt they must do something to make sure they win.

"So somebody was planted. At first it was a SAPP Muslim candidate who was supposed to be there but he was not big enough so Yong, as president, was fielded," he claimed, alleging that SAPP had before that said it would not contest the Batu Sapi by-election.

Yong came up last in the three-horse race between himself, BN's Linda Tsen and PKR's Ansari Abdullah.

"Had it not been for Batu Sapi, I would be scared of SAPP as they have very disciplined members... but he got fewer voters than Ansari so the Chinese were telling SAPP something but they are not listening," Edwin said.

Bumburing whacked from both sides

But in Sulaman, a state constituency within the parliamentary constituency of Tuaran, it is DAP's partner and PKR's candidate and incumbent MP Wilfred Bumburing who is copping attacks, this time from both the BN and the local PKR branch.

NONERudimentary hand-painted blue signboards made of plywood accuse him of being a "greedy frog", having defected from Upko to be Pakatan friendly.

"A greedy frog of a candidate must be changed," one signboard reads, turning the Sabah PKR battle-cry 'Tukar' (change) on its head.

Another reads: "Before he was running down PKR and its candidates, but now look where he is? Tukarrrrr... He is spitting onto his own face."

Banners were also spotted near Tuaran town pledging support for local PKR division chief Ansari, whose daughter Erveana is contesting against Bumburing as an Independent.

NONE"Reject leaders who are cruel, hypocritical, racist, a coward, lazy and backstab the people," one banner, surrounded by Erveana's poster, is spotted.

Political violence, unheard of in Sabah in recent years, also reared its ugly head on Sunday evening when the Semporna PAS office was attacked by men confirmed by police to be from BN.

By and large, especially among the Kadazandusun Murut leaders whose community

bears scars of being punished by BN for voting against it in the 1990s, the message from BN is that Najib is the face of change.

"Why change when Najib has only been there for four years? He is a new PM and he listens to us," they tell voters.

Billboards also tout the close relationship between BN component party leaders with Najib - one which they say will benefit the community in the long-run.

"(Upko president Bernard) Dompok can just knock on the PM's door and meet him, no appointments needed. Whatever you want, you will get," one speaker at a rally this week said.

Fear tactics and conspiracies

But the "transformation" script is also laced with scare tactics and conspiracy theories.

While in the peninsula PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim and PKR leaders are facing the brunt of the Lahad Datu blame game, BN leader in Sabah are also training their sights on Star's president Jeffrey Kitingan.

Star, one of the youngest parties of the lot, is making unexpected inroads particularly among the mostly Christian Kadazandusun Murut community in the interiors, and the BN message is as such tailored to them.

At a rally on Monday, BN's Kapayan candidate Marcus Mojigoh drew links between Jeffrey and "Taliban and Gaddafi-trained southern Filipinos" who landed in Lahad Datu.

NONE And keeping up with the Muslim extremist theme, non-Muslims that dominated BN parties in Sabah pass on the message that voting Pakatan will mean voting for the hudud law and chopped hands.

"Don't be scared to vote DAP, PAS or PKR. Hudud will not be implemented... it is not part of our manifesto," pleaded DAP's Putatan candidate Dr Joseph Lee at a rally last night.

Already an uphill climb, DAP's bid to win the urban parliamentary seats of Putatan and Sepangar could be further undermined as it goes on the defensive.

The scare tactics are also in play in Penampang, another urban Kadazandusun

Murut majority seat, which pundits say is at the very least hopeful for PKR's Ignatius Dorell Leiking.

If Pakatan cannot turn things around, it can only likely bag the Chinese-majority seats of Sandakan, Tawau and Kota Kinabalu, while in Beaufort where incumbent Lajim Ukin, who is contesting on PKR's ticket, is likely to pull through.

In fact, party sources say that DAP is still apprehensive about whether it can retain Kota Kinabalu, as difficulty to obtain permits for open air ceramah have made it hard to gauge if the 'Ubah' mood is truly in the capital city.

With three days to go to polling day, and only three of its target 10 seats from this key swing state in the bag, taking over Putrajaya remains difficult for Pakatan.

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