

**S'wak PKR optimistic of victory in state polls**  
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Sarawak Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) chief Baru Bian is cautiously optimistic ahead of the forthcoming state elections widely expected to be held early next year.

For perhaps the second time in the last 23 years, the opposition has a real shot at seizing the reins of power in the state. "It will be a real cliff-hanger this time around," he said.

"If the BN wins the state again, it will be purely by default as usual," said Baru (left), an Orang Ulu, who is tipped to be the next chief minister of Sarawak. "That's how the BN has been winning in Sarawak all these years.

NONEMalaysiakini caught up with Baru in Kota Kinabalu on the sidelines of a strategy session with PKR vice-president Jeffrey Gapani bin Kitingan (right) whose main mandate, as vice-president, is strategising in Sabah and Sarawak.

The Sarawak BN, according to Baru, is a "paper tiger". This is expected to be proven when the opposition gets its act together and takes on the ruling coalition one-to-one.

The opposition polls pact is almost ready except for four or five seats, Baru confirmed. "The Democratic Action Party (DAP) would like some Dayak seats. They have agreed to our Chinese seats."

The opposition pact is expected to make "mincemeat" of any candidates sponsored this time by the BN to split the votes against them. The sponsorship strategy is an old trick that the BN pulls out every election, added Baru.

"This time we are ready for them. We also know what other dirty tricks they will employ against us."

'Using the enemy's strength to defeat him'

Using an analogy from martial arts, the Sarawak PKR chief is strategising on the premise that "it's important to use the enemy's strength to defeat him and not exhaust ourselves taking him on".

He does not want to list the strategic strengths of Sarawak BN but concedes that "not all of it is within the bounds of the law".

bn supreme council mt meeting sapp sabah issue 190608 taib mahmudAmong issues being raised by the opposition, Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud (right) not surprisingly tops the list, followed by the corruption of others in public office, nepotism, cronyism and collusion, land rights, the award of native land to peninsular Malaysia-based plantation companies, and police brutality especially in Penan settlements and in land disputes, as well as gangsters running timber camps in the state.

Other issues include the influx of 500,000 foreign workers of whom a little over half are illegal immigrants, non-payment of compensation to those affected by the Batang Ai and Bakun dams, the ban on the import of Malay-language bibles from Indonesia and the ban on the use of the term 'Allah' in Malay print.

Baru reckons that if the state election were to be called today, the opposition will deny the two-third majority to the ruling coalition "purely on the strength of our organising skills".

The bonus factor, he added, is the fact that a core group of voters - the Chinese - have deserted the Taib government in droves.

He declines to go into specific numbers but ventures that at least 65 percent of the Chinese community, a very conservative estimate, is ready to embrace a change of government for better or worse. Hence, of the 16 Chinese-majority seats in the state assembly, an overwhelming majority are expected to fall to the opposition.

He also expects significant voter support from among the Dayak, especially the Bidayuh, the Orang Ulu, Iban and the Melanau - a third of whom are Muslims - and also the Malays who are in fact Bidayuh and Iban along the coast who converted to Islam. Of the 29 Dayak-majority seats, Baru sees none as safe for the BN.

Most of the safe BN bets, Baru (left) continued, are among the 26 Malay and Muslim Melanau seats. "Even then, it's already tough going for the BN in seven Muslim seats."

'No non-Muslim seats safe for BN'

"We can in fact confidently declare that none of the non-Muslim seats in the state assembly are safe for the BN," said Baru. "So, this makes planning doubly difficult for them. It will be the most expensive election in the history of Sarawak for the BN."

The voters are used to being bribed by the BN, charged Baru. However, if the BN forks out as usual, there's no guarantee this time that they will win.

Alternatively, if they hold back on "goodies" for the voters, they will seal their fate among the voters. Already, the state BN has taken the unusual step of publicly warning Iban longhouse chiefs that their "heads will roll" if their charges vote for the opposition.

Party-wise, it's reckoned by Baru that the Chinese-based Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) and the Dayak-based Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP) "continue to bleed to death".

That leaves the Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS) and the Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB), under Taib, to hold the fort for the BN. PRS, it's noted, "was the same party that was ready to ditch the BN after the 2008 political tsunami."

Baru is not under any illusion that it will be a walk in the park to cross the magical threshold of 36 seats in the 71-seat state assembly.

But indications are, he disclosed, that the opposition alliance is getting "nearer and nearer the target" all the time. "The longer the state polls are delayed, the better it will be for us since it gives us more time to get organised."

Failure of Ming Court Affair in 1987

The last time that the opposition had a real chance was in 1987, recalled Baru. "The opposition was defeated by the fact that Taib's maternal uncle, Abdul Rahman Ya'akub, was with them."

Dubbed the Ming Court Affair by TaiNONEb - after the hotel in Kuala Lumpur where Sarawak state assemblypersons gathered to oust Taib - a no-confidence motion was supposed to be moved in the state assembly. Rahman (left), by asking the state assemblypersons to gather in KL and delaying them there, gave Taib valuable time to dissolve the state assembly for snap polls.

The result, which scared Taib out of his wits, was 25 for the opposition and 31 for the state BN. The state BN, it was then reckoned, was flat broke by the time the polls were over.

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