



SUPP faces possible decimation in S'wak polls
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The Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), the largest Chinese-based party in the state, faces grim prospects of not



having any representatives in the state cabinet if Chinese support for them falters in the next state election.

The party is certainly concerned about this likely scenario if all its candidates do not succeed in the polls, scheduled to be held anytime between now and July next year.

The predominantly Chinese constituencies - Pending, Batu Lintang, Padungan (Kuching), Bukit Assek and Bawang Assan (Sibu), Piasau and Senadin (Miri) and Repok (Sarikei) - are part of the 19 seats allocated to SUPP.

In the last state election in 2006, SUPP lost eight seats, half of them in predominantly Chinese constituencies even though some of its leaders managed to pull through, including president Dr George Chan Hong Nam (Piasau), Deputy secretary-general Wong Soon Koh (Bawang Assan) and Treasurer-General David Teng Lung Chi (Repok).

The four Chinese majority seats the party failed to retain in 2006 were Pending, Batu Lintang, Padungan (all in Kuching) and Bukit Assek (Sibu). It also lost in three mixed constituencies - Kota Sentosa (in Kuching), Meradong (Bintangor), Kidurong (Bintulu), and a predominantly Iban seat, Engkilili (Sri Aman).

SUPP still managed to win in other predominantly Chinese areas such as Piasau (Miri) through deputy chief minister and party president and Bawang Assan through deputy secretary-general Wong Soon Koh.

This enabled SUPP to retain the two state ministers positions in the government, including one deputy chief minister's position.

SUPP's chances in next polls?

What about SUPP's chances in the next state election? Of the total 71 state seats, the Bumiputera-based Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) is likely to take the lion's share at 35, SUPP 19, Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS) nine and Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP) eight.

Interestingly, even if the SUPP were to lose all the contested seats, support for the other BB components is still strong and the ruling BN coalition is still be able to form the next state government.

This explains why some SUPP leaders have been going round telling the Chinese community in the state "to come to their senses" on the implication there could be no Chinese representation in the state government if SUPP is rejected.



Wong (*above*), who is SUPP Sibu chairman, who appealed to the Chinese community in the state not to sacrifice their "political strength", had openly said that they stood to lose a lot if SUPP were to be voted out.

But a political analyst at Monash University here, James Chin, said the Chinese voters may not be receptive to such a notion as he questioned about the attraction of SUPP's present crop of ageing leaders.

He claimed that the younger SUPP leaders have been clamouring for change, reform and renewal to move the party forward.

On the other side of the coin, being swept aside in the election could turn out to be a blessing in disguise as SUPP could be forced to undertake real reforms like what the Kuomintang (KMT) did in Taiwan and bounced back later, said Chin.

Using racial sentiments?

The opposition DAP argues that the SUPP is again employing racial sentiments to attract Chinese voters.

Sarawak DAP secretary Chong Chieng Jen (*left*) claimed that SUPP had been hoodwinking the Chinese people in the state for the past 40 years into believing that they needed the party to represent them in the BN but the politically savvy and better educated urban Chinese voters would not take such a bait.

From SUPP's evaluation, it appears that the party can depend on four so-called safe Bidayuh-majority seats -- Opar, Bengoh, Simanggang and Engkilili.

The remaining 15 seats are divided into either "black" or "grey" areas with the predominantly Chinese constituencies making up the majority of the "black areas" and the mixed constituencies regarded as "grey".

The "black areas" are Pending, Padungan, Batu Lintang, Kota Sentosa, Meradong, Bukit Assek, Kidurong and Repok while seven "grey areas" are Batu Kawa, Bawang Assan, Pelawan, Dudong, Piasau, Senadin and Pujut.

If the SUPP ended up winning only a couple of mixed seats, it could spell bleak times for the party which claimed to represent not only the Chinese but Dayaks as well, said SUPP Sibu publicity chief Daniel Ngieng.

LDP President VK Liew (*left*) said other BN parties were also concerned that if SUPP were to lose all the Chinese seats, it could send a strong message to the Chinese community in the other states.

He believed that the DAP's triumph in winning many Chinese-based seats in the 2006 Sarawak state election had motivated the Opposition to deny BN its two thirds majority in the 2008 general election.

Gerakan secretary-general Teng Chang Yeow said there was a real concern among the Chinese-based parties in BN on the repercussions from a dismal performance by SUPP.

- Bernama

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