

Malay-Melanau Remains Bastion Of BN Support
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MUKAH -- The predominantly Malay-Melanau constituencies look set to remain a stronghold of Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu, the lynchpin of the Sarawak Barisan Nasional.

Most in the Malay-Melanau community find no reason to opt for another political party, given the development that is continuing in their areas, according to analysts. And they are grateful to the man they deem responsible for their progress.

It is also a source of pride to them that one of their own is the Chief Minister although their community forms only 27 per cent of Sarawak's 2.4 million population.

This "minority factor", as Universiti Malaysia Sarawak senior lecturer Dr Jeniri Amir explains, binds them politically, especially since they know that a government led by Abdul Taib Mahmud will continue to fulfil their needs.

"They are basically happy with what has been done in their areas. The Melanaus especially have strong sentiment about him as their leader. They know this is going to be his last term in office and they want to show him their support," he said

Taib, the Chief Minister and PBB President who has been in office for 30 years, has already made it known that this election will be his last.

He is expected to have no difficulty defending his Balingian seat in Mukah.

PBB, which held 26 of the 71 seats in the last state legislative assembly, has been allocated 35 constituencies, of which 26 are Malay-Melanau dominated and the other nine are Dayak areas.

Jeniri said that a survey that he and several other lecturers from the university carried out recently in the Melanau heartland showed about 84 per cent support for BN, about the same as in the 2006 state election.

Taib is expected to have no difficulty retaining his Balingian seat in Mukah.

Jeniri said that Taib also has the support of the other races in the constituency, which has seen tremendous development since he changed his electoral base in the 2001 election from Asajaya in the Samarahan Division.

"Most of the close-knit Chinese community in the constituency who speak fluent Melanau are throwing their weight behind him," he said.

While the support of the elder generation in the Malay-Melanau community is still solid, the young voters may have their own preference, he said.

"Even so, the number of young voters who may vote for the opposition is insignificant," Jeniri added.

According to PBB Balingian vice-chairman Akit Sebli, the party would face no problem

retaining all the Malay-Melanau seats.

He said the Malays and Melanaus saw themselves as one when it came to politics.

Of the 26 seats, only seven have Melanaus as the majority -- Balingian, Jepak, Dalat, Jemoreng, Daro, Belawai and Semop. The others are Malay-dominated.

Although the opposition admits that creating an impact in the Malay-Melanau constituencies would be tough, some political analysts warned that these areas are not impregnable.

PBB almost lost three seats in the 2006 state election, only managing a majority of 94 votes in Saribas, 858 in Sadong Jaya and 895 in Beting Maro.

Another senior lecturer of the university, Dr Awang Azman Awang Pawi, said these three rural constituencies would be a crucial battleground for PBB and BN.

Awang said that BN had to consider the "personality factor" and "basic politics" when choosing its candidates and planning its strategy in these areas.

The right candidates who can convince voters that their basic needs would be taken care of would help BN improve its majority in these areas, he said.

As for the other constituencies allotted to PBB, Awang is certain that PBB would have no trouble winning although PKR might seem to have gained some support in Sadang Jaya, and PAS in Beting Maro.

(Bernama)

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