

Will Split Contests Give BN The Advantage?
Malaysianmirror.com
April 7, 2011

KUCHING -- The Barisan Nasional (BN) holds the advantage in the many split contests in the upcoming Sarawak state polls but it still faces an acid test in voter swings, said an analyst.

"If the government wants to take the Sarawak election as an indicator, they have to perform well not only in the rural and urbanised areas, but also in places where the Chinese are the majority," said Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) political science lecturer Dr Sivamurugan Pandian.

"I believe the pressure is on BN because this could also become the platform to indicate the swing of votes, either they are still with BN or shifting away," he said when contacted by Bernama.

The April 16 state election, for which nominations were held yesterday, drew a record turnout of 213 candidates including 41 independents, and for the first time, all 71 seats will be contested.

Dr Sivamurugan said if there were multiple contenders in one area, it would be to BN's advantage.

"When you have more than one contender in a single constituency, normally it would benefit the BN because they have better manpower and a more structured machinery compared with the opposition and also independent candidates.

"Comprehensive logistics is also very important due to the geographical factor of the state, and there a lots of people staying in rural areas. I think BN has the advantage," he added.

After nominations, the BN has 27 straight fights with the DAP, Parti Keadilan Rakyat or PAS and 44 multi-cornered tussles with the inclusion of the Sarawak National Party (SNAP) and independents.

Meanwhile, Prof Dr Ahmad Atory Hussain, also a political science lecturer from the same university, concurred with Sivamurugan.

He said the increase in independents from 20 in the last election in 2006, was due to internal problems in political parties.

Contesting as independents was their way of showing dissatisfaction with certain leaders, he said, adding that he did not expect them to get far.

"It is a show of protest or they think their influence is strong because the last time around there were independents who garnered a sizable number of votes," he said.

This would only split votes to the benefit of BN, he said.

He also anticipated voter turnout to be higher than the 63.71 per cent in the 2006 election as voters had more options this time around.

Better infrastructure and logistics provided by the Election Commission would also contribute to higher voter turnout, he added.

(Bernama)

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Source : <http://www.malaysianmirror.com/media-buzz-detail/6-nation/52754>