

Sarawak's Moment Of Reckoning
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KUCHING -- The moment of reckoning dawns tomorrow for the people of Sarawak after the hottest ever campaign waged in the fight for the 71 seats of the state assembly.

Confidence in the Barisan Nasional (BN) camp has soared in the final days with the visibility of Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak who crissed-crossed the state, visiting longhouses and townships, to deliver first hand the government's transformation plan to bring greater prosperity for Sarawak and the rest of the country.

Wrapping up his tour in the Iban heartland today by visiting the tiny towns of Kapit and Song along the mighty Rajang River, Najib had a parting message to Sarawakians before he returned to Kuala Lumpur.

"Don't vote based on sentiments. The question that needs to be thought over by Sarawak voters is the cooperation between the federal and state governments for a better future because Sarawak is a very big state which needs huge investments particularly in modern infrastructure," he said.

Najib, who is the national BN chairman, has emerged as the pillar of the BN campaign following the incessant attacks by the opposition against the long tenure of Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud.

Backed by Muhyiddin Yassin, his deputy in the Cabinet and BN, Najib is confident that Sarawakians would return the BN with a two-thirds majority.

The Barisan Nasional (BN) is stumping for a big win and is confident that it will gain a two-thirds majority, and dash the opposition's ambition of taking over the state.

The polls will see the BN contesting in all 71 seats with candidates from the state BN component parties, the Taib-led Parti Pesaka Bumiputera (PBB), Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS) and Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP).

In 2006, the BN captured 62 seats on polling day and later, a SNAP assemblyman joined the coalition for BN to have 63 seats in house before its dissolution.

While the BN can look forward to the bumiputera wave to carry the coalition through, a thorny question remains over SUPP which is fighting for its survival as a representative of the Chinese here.

SUPP is struggling against the DAP for control of the urban Chinese seats and unspared is the Piasau seat in Miri to be defended by SUPP president Dr George Chan.

In 2006, the opposition captured eight seats of which six were won by the DAP at the expense of the SUPP.

The DAP is part of the peninsula-based opposition front hogging the fight against the BN. It is contesting 15 Chinese-dominated and mixed Chinese-Iban seats.

The other two in the pact, Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) is contesting in 49 Malay/Melanau and Dayak constituencies, and PAS in five Malay areas.

Also in the fray is the Sarawak National Party (SNAP) running in 26 Dayak seats, Parti Cinta Malaysia (PCM) in six bumiputera areas and the unprecedented number of 41 independents.

The group includes 15 candidates from the yet-to-be registered Parti Ekonomi Rakyat Sarawak Bersatu (PERSB) which will be using the aeroplane symbol and nine PKR members who were sacked for choosing to run as independents.

Two prominent independents are Salleh Jafaruddin, a second cousin of Taib, who is challenging the chief minister in a three-cornered fight in Balingian, and lawyer Dominique Ng, who is defending the Padungan seat in Kuching, after he was axed by PKR despite being the sole PKR winner in 2006.

The heat of the election is expected to see a bigger crowd when 1,748 voting centres open across the state tomorrow.

The Election Commission expects a turnout of between 65 and 75 per cent from the 979,796 eligible voters. Turnout in 2006 was 63.2 percent.

Police have also advised voters to cast their ballots early in view of rain forecast in the afternoon.

(Bernama)

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