

## **Sarawak Elections 2006: Good start for BN**

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KUCHING: With two seats in the bag on nomination day yesterday, the Barisan Nasional is expected to romp home to victory yet again in Sarawak.

Newcomer Murni Suhaili won uncontested in Daro, one of nine new seats. In Dalat, Ibrahim Seruji withdrew from the contest as an Independent candidate 15 minutes before nominations closed, enabling Datin Fatimah Abdullah, the State Assistant Minister for Agriculture, to win unopposed.

The two women are among the BN's six women candidates in the ninth State elections to be held 10 days from now.

Following a recent delineation exercise, Sarawak has 71 state seats, the largest number for any State in the country. The new seats are Bukit Saban, Opar, Bukit Sentosa, Lingga, Balai Ringin, Daro, Bekenu, Pujut and Batu Danau.

Sarawak's most dominant political figure, Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, who is also State BN chairman and Parti Pesaka Bumiputra Bersatu president, is defending his Balingian seat in a straight fight with Parti Keadilan Rakyat's Ibrahim Bayau, a former bank officer.

Apart from Balingian, the BN faces straight fights in 53 other constituencies. The coalition is also involved in three-cornered contests in 13 constituencies, a four-cornered fight in one constituency and a five-cornered in another constituency.

Deputy Chief Minister and deputy PBB president Tan Sri Alfred Jabu faces SNAP's Dayrell Walter Entrie and Independent Peter John Jaban in his bid to retain his Layar seat.

PBB vice-president Datuk Seri Abang Johari Abang Openg, is facing Keadilan's Mohamad Jolhi for the Satok seat.

Leaders from the three other parties in the State BN — the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS), and the Sarawak People's Democratic Party (SPDP) — are also facing fights.

SUPP president and Piasau incumbent Tan Sri Dr George Chan is being challenged by another medical doctor, Dr Francis Ngu.

Datuk Seri James Masing, the Baleh incumbent who heads PRS, is up against Lucius Anak Jimbon of SNAP, a rival Dayak-based party that used to be in the BN coalition before a power struggle saw it outside the fold.

Datuk William Mawan Ikom, president of SPDP, is facing SNAP candidate Boos Anak Tutong.

Nicholas Bawin, the president of the Malaysian Dayak Congress (MDC) which has yet to be registered, is standing as a SNAP candidate in Batang Air against BN's Dublin Unting Ingkot, who won unopposed in the previous election.

SNAP president Edwin Dundang faces BN newcomer Robert Lawson Chuat in a straight fight for the Bukit Saban seat.

Keadilan is not the only peninsular-based party taking part in the polls. The DAP, the sole Opposition party that won in the previous state elections five years ago, is banking on a team of 12 candidates headed by state chairman Richard Wong Ho Leng. Wong is trying to unseat the incumbent from Bukit Assek, the BN's Daniel Ngieng Kiong Ann.

Pas is trying to gain a foothold in the State. It is concentrating all its resources on Alem Din, who is up against BN's Bolhassan Di in Beting Maro.

Keadilan is contesting 25 seats and SNAP 29. Twenty independents are contesting in 16 constituencies.