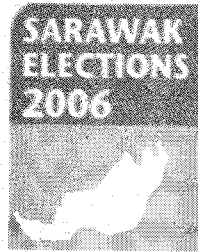


Victory with a question mark

NST - 21/5/2006

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HOW THEY FARED

Barisan Nasional		
Parties	Seats contested	Won
PBB	35	35
SUPP	19	11
PRS	9	8
SPDP	8	8
TOTAL SEATS WON		62
Opposition		
Parties	Seats contested	Won
SNAP	29	1
DAP	12	6
KEADILAN	25	1
IND 20 candidates	16	1
PAS	1	
TOTAL SEATS WON		9



The raised hands say it all. Taib (second from right), who retained the Balingian state seat, celebrates BN's victory with (from left) Datin Fatimah Abdullah (Dalat), Dublin Unting Ingkot (Batang Air), Tan Sri Alfred Jabu Numpang (Layar) and Datuk Seri Abang Johari Openg (Satok). — Picture by Hariff Hassan

KUCHING: They won by a mile but Barisan Nasional politicians still sounded deflated.

Perhaps it is because losing and reduced majorities are not in the vocabulary of BN politicians in Sarawak, yet they had to confront both scenarios yesterday after watching the Opposition snare nine seats, their best showing in recent years.

BN won 62 of the 71 seats on offer and once again won the support of the majority of Malay, Melanau, Iban, Bidayuh and Orang Ulu voters.

But it was a victory with a question mark.

Sarawak United People's Party candidates in Kuching and Sibu tumbled like tenpins to the DAP and there were reduced majorities in many constituencies.

It lost eight of the 19 seats it contested.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, who will turn 70 tomorrow, said he was not "shocked but distressed at the performance" of SUPP, the Chinese-based party in the BN coalition.

He likened the DAP's performance in Sarawak over the years to that of a wave, sometimes up and sometimes down.

SUPP president Tan Sri George Chan, in a touching moment, apologised to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is in Cairo, for failing to deliver all the seats, during a teleconference.

Chan, who was in Miri, flew into Kuching later last night and rushed to Taib's residence to join other party leaders who were celebrating BN's victory.

A gloomy Chan apologised to Taib for the SUPP's performance. But Taib responded by saying: "Don't talk about the sorry

side. Talk about the happy side.

"You can still serve the people."

This was the largest number of seats won by the Opposition since 1987 when Persatuan Rakyat Malaysia Sarawak led by Tun Abdul Rahman Yakub took five seats while PBDS won in 15 constituencies.

The DAP won six seats while Parti Keadilan Rakyat, SNAP and an Independent candidate took one each.

Abdullah said a post mortem should be carried out to find out the reason the party did not fare as well in urban areas.

The only Opposition representative in the previous state assembly was Chiew Chiu Sing of the DAP, who retained the Kidurong seat by polling 8,517 votes to BN candidate Paul Yong's 6,853 votes. Taib, as expected, retained

the Balingian seat. The Sarawak Barisan Nasional chairman polled 6,393 votes to defeat his sole challenger, Ibrahim Bayau of Parti Keadilan Rakyat, by a majority of 5,726 votes.

But his majority was down from the 7,301 he received in the 2001 elections.

He is scheduled to be sworn in today as the Chief Minister for the eighth term since 1981.

Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr George Chan secured a 3,918 majority over his opponent Dr Francis Ngu of Keadilan for the Piasau seat.

This was a drastic drop from the 7,637 majority he had in the last elections.

The majority of the other Deputy Chief Minister, Tan Sri Alfred Jabu, also saw a decline.

In the previous elections, he had a majority of 4,533 votes but this time around it was 2,677.

He secured 3,767 votes against SNAP candidate

Dayrell Walter Entrie's 1,090 and Independent Peter John Jaban's 105.

In fact, a random sampling of 10 seats that the BN won showed that all but one had been won with a reduced majority.

In the Saribas constituency, for instance, the BN won by a thin 94-vote majority compared with its 2,197 majority in the 2001 State elections.

In most cases, the BN's majority in each of these 10 constituencies was reduced by 200 to 1,500 votes.

In the sampling, the BN won with an increased majority of 459 votes in Tasik Biru.

Datuk Seri James Masing, the Parti Rakyat Sarawak president won in Baleh and Datuk William Mawan, the Sarawak Progressive Democratic party president in Pakan.

The BN had no difficulty in forming the State Government and by 8.33pm, it had already secured the 36 seats required for a simple majority to form

the Government.

However, the BN was handed defeats in Kota Sentosa (Kuching), Padungan (Kuching), Pending (Kuching), Batu Lintang (Kuching), Meradong (Bintanggor), Bukit Assek (Sibu), Kidurong (Bintulu), Engkilili (Sri Aman) and Ngemah (Kanowit).

At a Press conference immediately after the Election Commission announced that the coalition had secured a simple majority, Taib, in commenting on the Opposition's showing, said: "We accept our fate."

"This is the voice of the people and we will study why voters in these constituencies voted the Opposition.

"It appears that the DAP had managed to convince the people with its propaganda. We accept their decision."

The DAP was given a morale-boosting victory in Bukit Assek when its State chairman Wong Ho Leng wrested it with a convincing majority of 4,751 after getting

10,380 votes.

The seat has always seen a see-saw battle between the BN and DAP in past elections.

Wong, 47, won the seat in the 1996 elections when he scalped the then Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Wong Soon Kai, who was also the SUPP president.

The DAP also won in Kota Sentosa, Pending, Batu Lintang, Meradong and retained its Kidurong seat. Keadilan, which came to Sarawak in 2001, won a foothold by taking the Padungan seat.

The SNAP's Dr Johnikal Rayong Ngipah was the sole candidate from the party to win a seat.

An upset occurred in Ngemah where incumbent Gabriel Adit, who stood as an Independent, retained the seat which he won in 2001 under the BN ticket.

Meanwhile Election Commission chairman Tan Sri Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman was disappointed with the voter turnout.