

**Sarawak BN In Top Gear For Next General Election, Says State BN Sec- Gen  
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KUCHING, Dec 2 (Bernama) -- The Sarawak Barisan Nasional (BN) is well prepared to face the next general election as the current political scenario in the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) and Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP) will not affect the coalition's strength, Sarawak BN secretary-general Datuk Dr Stephen Rundi said Friday.

Dr Rundi, who is also Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) secretary-general, said the election machinery of all the state component parties is still intact, fresh from the state election in April this year.

"As you can see, Umno is the backbone of the BN and PBB is the backbone of the Sarawak BN, and we (PBB) are in the position to actually assist some smaller component parties to get themselves ready for the coming (13th general) election," Dr Rundi, who is also state Assistant Minister for Public Utilities, told Bernama.

Commenting on the reminder by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak yesterday for all Umno members to close ranks to face the polls, which he had said would be held very soon, Dr Rundi said he was confident that the BN national chairman (Najib) and BN state chairman Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud were very aware of the situation in Sarawak.

"They know when to strike the gong (to hold the election)," he said.

In preparing all the four state component parties -- PBB, Parti Rakyat Sarawak, SPDP and SUPP -- to face the election, Dr Rundi said he was confident the rural voters, especially bumiputeras, would very much still give their support to the BN but lamented that support from urban voters in some areas had swung away from the BN.

However, the BN could not put the blame for the decreasing support entirely on the voters, especially the Chinese, because the component parties themselves have to look at their own weaknesses, he said.

On potential candidates, he said, the state BN would leave the matter to the individual parties to come up with the winnable candidates.

"For PBB, I am sure the list is with the party president (Abdul Taib) and, in the usual manner, we usually leave it to the top leadership to decide who is winnable in which area," he said, adding that the concept was proven in the last state election when PBB's 10 new faces garnered the support of the people, who wanted to see transformation and the party remain relevant.

Given that the BN won 30 of the total 31 seats contested in the 2008 parliamentary election but later lost the Sibu seat in a by-election, he was optimistic that the number of white areas or BN strongholds is definitely more than the grey or black areas.

Meanwhile, PBB Wanita deputy chief Datuk Fatimah Abdullah said the wing and those of its coalition partners would not rest on their laurels even though the machinery is already in full gear.

Fatimah, who is also state Welfare, Women and Family Development Minister, said the gender issue would have to take secondary importance as the top priority was to ensure that only winnable candidates were nominated in the next election.

She said that while Sarawak currently has two women parliamentarians, both from the PBB, the question of fielding more women as candidates this time around was the prerogative of the state and national BN top leaders.

"We will give the best we can," said Fatimah, who is also chief of the Dalat PBB branch.

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