

Sabah BN a winning force
New Straits Times
27 March 2013
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COMPONENTS UNITED: State BN should have no problem keeping its two-thirds majority

WITH the 13th general election around the corner, questions are being asked if Sabah and Sarawak will remain the "fixed deposit" of the ruling Barisan Nasional to keep Putrajaya.

There are 25 parliamentary seats up for grabs in Sabah, and 31 in neighbouring Sarawak.

In the 2008 general election, the BN almost made a clean sweep of the 56 federal seats in the two states, losing only in the Chinese-majority constituencies of Kota Kinabalu and Kuching.

Knowing that a big win in Sabah and Sarawak could well decide who gets to form the next government, the central leaderships of both the ruling and opposition parties have been frequently shuttling across the South China Sea to the two states over the last two years.

However, it appears that the BN, rejuvenated after Datuk Seri Najib Razak took over its leadership, looks set to yet again stamp its mark in east Malaysia.

Since assuming the premiership, Najib has given special focus to the two states, which are often described as less developed compared with the rest in Malaysia.

Over the last four years, the prime minister, despite his tight schedule, had made countless trips to Sabah and Sarawak, to see for himself what needs to be done to further uplift the well-being of the people in the two states.

Billions of ringgit have been allocated for the two states whose combined size is bigger than the peninsula. And the result is evident with new roads, bridges, schools, hospitals and other amenities crucial to improve the livelihood of the people provided.

The whopping development allocation and the various initiatives he had introduced in the two states have endeared Najib with the estimated seven million Sabahans and Sarawakians.

But it is not just about development. The people in the two states are also grateful to Najib for making bold decisions which they thought would never become a reality.

Soon after becoming prime minister, Najib declared Sept 16, the day the federation of Malaysia was formed of which Sabah and Sarawak were an integral part, a national holiday.

To many Sabahans and Sarawakians, Sept 16 is not only a significant but also a historical date close to their hearts, and they see Najib's decision as a reflection of his sincere desire to see the two states move forward in tandem with the rest in Malaysia in all aspects of development in line with the 1Malaysia concept he espouses.

In Sabah, Najib had taken the bull by the horns when he agreed to the formation of the Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) to probe the large presence of illegal immigrants in the state, a longstanding problem that has been a key issue in every election.

It was indeed a brave decision which caught the opposition by surprise, leaving them with no choice but to portray the RCI as toothless, when by right everybody should wait for the outcome of the investigation before making any conclusion.

The affirmative action and decisiveness of the prime minister to effectively deal with the armed intruders in Lahad Datu and Semporna, has the whole of Malaysia, especially Sabah, convinced about how much he cared for the people's safety and security.

To the people of Sabah, the prompt formation of the Eastern Sabah Security Command (Esscom) and the Eastern Sabah Safety Zone (Esszone) was proof of Najib's total commitment to protect the state from unwanted elements in the future.

The people of Sabah will surely know how to appropriately deal with the opposition who seem more inclined, rather stupidly, to depict the armed incursion as a sandiwara (play-acting) by Umno, when casting their votes.

The people's ire against those who belittled the sacrifice of our security forces defending our country's sovereignty in Lahad Datu and Semporna, which had seen eight officers killed, must not be taken lightly.

Recognising how crucial Sabah and Sarawak are in their hope of capturing Putrajaya, key opposition leaders, especially Pakatan Keadilan Rakyat de facto chief Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and DAP stalwart Lim Kit Siang, too have been making regular visits to the two states.

Both leaders have been talking about how much they cared about Sabah, but their actions seem to show otherwise. Their arrogance in brushing aside suggestions from local opposition parties to work out a compromise on a single candidate to take on the BN has cast suspicion about their real intention.

The failure of the peninsula and Sabah-based opposition parties to strike a deal on the distribution of seats may prove costly to them.

Pakatan Rakyat's decision to accommodate the unregistered entity headed respectively by Datuk Seri Wilfred Bumburing and Datuk Seri Lajim Ukin, but not the Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) and State Reform Party (STAR) has cast doubts on the opposition front's sincerity.

In any case, most of the local opposition political figures in Sabah are recycled leaders whom many describe as more interested in protecting their interests.

On the other hand, unity and cooperation among component members of the state BN under the leadership of chief minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman is at its strongest. This is a plus point to the ruling coalition.

The state BN should also have no problem keeping its two-thirds majority in the 60-member State Legislative Assembly, although it may have to work hard to retain some seats.

A tough contest is expected in some marginal seats with the results expected to go either way, but it is not far-fetched for BN to repeat its success in 2008.

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Source: <http://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnist/sabah-bn-a-winning-force-1.242511>