

Sarawak BN Confident Of Winning 26 Of 31 Seats In GE13
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KUCHING, May 3 (Bernama) -- Boosted by the strong support from Sarawakians, especially at the tail-end of the campaign, the Sarawak Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition is optimistic that its conservative forecast of winning 26 of the 31 parliamentary seats at stake in the state in the 13th general election can come true.

A confidence booster, undoubtedly, came in the form of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak, who is also the BN chairman. He has been able to get the people closer to the BN with a gruelling campaign tour that included helicopter-hopping to the interior areas in Lubok Antu as well as Saratok, Kuching and Sibü to woo voters, armed with the BN's "Akujanji" manifesto.

"The BN message had gone down very well with the people, who are fed up with the opposition's lies on issues like the native customary rights (NCR) and dam projects," said Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) supreme council member Datuk Idris Buang, who is a member of the well-oiled election machinery manning the PBB operations room at the PBB headquarters here.

He said protecting the right of the people to land, including NCR land for the bumiputeras, was one of the priorities of the BN government under the transformation programme of Najib at the federal level and Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud at the state level.

Having heard many grouses about the opposition from the man-in-the-street, he was confident that the state BN would win the 26 seats despite the somewhat fluid political situation up till Sunday's polling.

Given this forecast scenario, the PBB, which takes pride in being the most disciplined Sarawak BN component party, could expect a 100 per cent victory by retaining all the 14 seats it was contesting, mainly in the rural areas, he said.

Another BN political analyst said bumiputera votes from the Malay/Melanau constituents in the urban Chinese-majority seats of Lanang and Sibü could be relied upon to add the tally in BN's favour even though these two Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) seats were rated as "black" by the coalition in the face of overwhelming odds.

At present, only the Serian parliamentary seat out of the seven SUPP seats was categorised as "white" or safe for the BN due to its predominantly rural Bidayuh voters but he believed the party still had "the fighting spirit for a fighting chance," especially as Najib had gained some ground in Chinese areas throughout the country.

The local business community was also warming up to the BN because it was starting to realise that no other party except the BN could deliver, he said.

In the 2008 general election, the SUPP won six out of seven seats contested but lost another seat, Sibü, in a parliamentary by-election two years later.

While the personality of the candidates plays a decisive role, Najib's public denouncement of the Sarawak Workers Party (SWP) during his recent whirlwind visit to Lubok Antu had also dealt a blow to the self-proclaimed BN friendly party's attempt to deprive Parti Rakyat

Sarawak (PRS) of all its six seats in the Iban heartland.

It definitely cleared the air, as far as the BN stand was concerned, because the voters can now make the better choice of opting for BN and its continuous transformation than a family-oriented party that sees SWP president Larry Sng standing in Lubok Antu, his father Datuk Sng Chee Hua in Selangau and an uncle, George Lagong, in Hulu Rajang.

The political analyst said the opposition PKR's confidence to grab Saratok was dented when the prime minister campaigned for BN candidate Tan Sri William Mawan who is up against PKR's Ali Biju in a three-cornered tussle which also involves independent candidate, Datuk Abang Rosli Abang Paleng.

Najib managed to convince incumbent Jelaing Mersat, who had been dropped as a candidate, and his supporters to rally behind the BN.

He said that for Mawan, the Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP) president and a state minister whom he described as a "diplomatic person and survivor," the stake had been too high because Ali was deemed to be popular in Krian due to his current capacity as the state assemblyman while Jelaing had been sulking for being dropped.

Apart from Saratok, SPDP is also contesting in three other seats including Baram where newcomer Anyi Ngau is expected to give a fresh approach to the Baram dam issue, highlighting that the development of hydro projects serves as a catalyst for better economic growth.

Come Sunday, voters in Sarawak will only elect their representatives in the Dewan Rakyat as the term of the 71-member Sarawak state legislative assembly expires only in 2016.

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