

Calm political scenario in Sarawak, BN confident of landslide victory

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KUCHING, April 8 (Bernama) -- All seem to be smooth sailing for Sarawak Barisan Nasional (BN) in the 14th General Election (GE14), which is expected to be called at any time by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak following the dissolution of Parliament on April 7.

Current political scenario in Sarawak showed that the confidence level in Sarawak BN's camp is every high, which prompted Sarawak Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Abang Johari Tun Openg to confidently announce that BN Sarawak will at least retain all the 25 seats it won in GE13.

Abang Johari, who is also Sarawak BN chairman, even said besides retaining the 25 seats, BN would also wrest back another two to three urban seats won by the opposition in the last general election.

Currently six urban parliamentary seats in the state with Chinese majority voters are in the opposition camp, with five of them being represented by the DAP, namely Bandar Kuching, Stampin, Sarikei, Sibu and Lanang, while Miri was won by the PKR.

Even though Parliament has been dissolved, the situation in Sarawak remained very calm because even the opposition pact is not fighting in the open for seats as in the previous election except for a BN component party, Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) and its splinter party United People's Party (UPP) - for these six seats.

Abang Johari had said that BN could win back the six seats it lost to the opposition if SUPP

and BN friendly UPP could resolve their differences effectively and reconcile. Towards that, the two political parties witnessed by Abang Johari recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with regards to the distribution of seats and cooperation between them.

The chief minister has also repeatedly urged voters in Sarawak to support Najib and vote for BN in the GE14, describing Najib as being preferred over former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad because of his concern for Sabah and Sarawak issues.

He also repeatedly said voters in Sarawak should reject Dr Mahathir as prime minister whom he described as well-known for not taking into account power sharing and autonomous rights when he was prime minister.

Abang Johari said Najib was willing to hear and agree with the requests from Sarawak leaders regarding the Malaysia Agreement 1963.

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) Faculty of Social Sciences senior lecturer Associate Professor Dr Jeniri Amir said the openness of Najib was an impetus for voters in Sarawak to remain loyal to BN at least in the GE14.

Jeniri said the people of Sarawak especially the Bumiputera voters appreciated the way the prime minister treated Sarawak with his frequent visits to the state and taking serious efforts to deliver more infrastructure, economic and economy development here.

He added that Sarawak voters were more concerned with issues related to their lives, children's and government support than the RM2.6 billion donation or 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) issue.

"Based on our findings, 60 per cent of voters in Sarawak supported the prime minister despite the numerous allegations against him," Jeniri said when contacted by Bernama.

He added that the government's ability to fulfil its promises like the 1Malaysia People's Aid (BR1M) aid has also become a powerful weapon in winning the hearts of the Sarawak people.

The political analyst also said opposition parties in the state especially the DAP was able to draw support in the urban areas due to the ongoing conflict between SUPP and UPP, and was of the opinion that an effective solution must be found to resolve the differences between the two parties within the next few days before the nomination.

"I believe that urban seats such as Sibul and Sarikei won by the DAP in the last election could be recaptured by the BN. It is also not impossible if the Miri seat could be wrested back if the two sparring parties (SUPP and UPP) could reach a consensus," he said.

Jeniri said the state BN should also look for the right formula to resolve the conflict between the two parties which had been ongoing since 2012.

In fact, he said the opposition has reached a saturation point in Chinese-majority seats in Sarawak, with six parliamentary seats in GE13, namely Kuching, Stampin, Sarikei, Lanang, Sibul and Miri.

Meanwhile, he said rural parliamentary seats also pose their own sets of challenges to the BN, however it was more due to the choice of candidates.

"An example is the Selangau Parliamentary seat which will be shaky if the incumbent (Datuk Joseph Entulu Belaun) is not renominated for the seat.

"But I am confident that the BN would be able to dominate the rural seats as the majority of the people there are hopeful of BN bringing in developments," he added.

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