

## **Development brings scattered Libaran residents home**

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KOTA KINABALU: At one point, the parliamentary constituency of Libaran saw streams of residents leaving in search of opportunities in more developed areas.

Many, especially from the rural areas, left to live in bigger towns or cities although some were forced to stay in squatter areas.

However, steady development in the constituency, one of three in the greater Sandakan district, is now seeing many return home.

According to its MP Juslie Ajirol, this is due to the many staff quarters built for government servants, the similar accommodations by private businesses, and the infrastructure development in the area.

“There has also been the provision of proper infrastructure like roads, schools and basic amenities. People have come back and built new villages,” the four-term MP told FMT.

“In the last election, there were close to 40,000 voters but now there are 53,000 registered voters.”

Juslie said the government had also provided land for the residents to create settlements.

“We have Muhibbah town which is fast developing, and hopefully soon a new township in Sungai Tiram. This will become a feeder town to at least 10 villages.”

Libaran is also home to the Sandakan education hub, which means that parents do not have to send their children away to further their studies.

The education hub includes Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Sandakan Polytechnic and the Mara Junior Science College.

Several initiatives are also underway to involve fishermen and farmers in small and medium industries, Juslie added.



Sabah Chief Minister Musa Aman (centre, blue cap), Juslie Ajirol (black cap) and Gum-Gum rep Zakaria Edris (white cap) with BN supporters at the Kg Nunuyan Laut polling district machinery centre.

Libaran is the biggest constituency in the Sandakan district, which also contains the parliamentary seats of Sandakan and Batu Sapi.

It is a mixture of suburban and rural areas, mostly concentrated along rivers and coastlines, with a network of islands, some of them inhabited.

Wildlife conservation is a mainstay in Libaran, with the Orangutan Sepilok rehabilitation centre, the 1,740-hectare Turtle Island Park, and Labuk Bay proboscis monkey sanctuary centred in the constituency.

Under Libaran are the state constituencies of Sungai Sibuga and Gum-Gum. Sabah Chief Minister Musa Aman has held Sungai Sibuga since 1995 while Umno's Zakaria Edris has been Gum-Gum assemblyman since 2004.

Libaran has always been a Barisan Nasional (BN) bastion, with votes for Musa and Juslie rising with each election since 2004.

Zakaria, who is Sabah assistant local government and housing minister, won his Gum-Gum seat uncontested in 2008.

Juslie is optimistic of another good outing for BN in the 14th general election (GE14), but says he is not underestimating his potential challengers.

“There will be a challenge from the opposition, but between me and the chief minister, our votes have always increased,” he said.

Although Juslie’s challengers have always been from PKR, he also expects an appearance from parties like Parti Warisan Sabah (Warisan), which has been trying to penetrate the BN fort.

In the 2013 election, Juslie collected 19,584 votes, defeating PKR’s Mohd Serman Hassnar by a majority of 11,586. Independent Sahar Saka garnered 3,219 votes while STAR’s Rosnah Unsari obtained 502.

In 2008, Juslie beat PKR’s Ahmad Thamrin Jaini in a head-to-head battle by a 7,529-vote majority.

About 57% of voters in Libaran comprise Muslim Bumiputeras while Chinese voters make up 21% and non-Muslim Bumiputeras 15%.

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