

RECORD NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT EXPECTED IN SARAWAK POLLS

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KUCHING: Expect a record number of independent candidates in the 11th Sarawak election.

In 2011, there were 41 Independents, the most so far. Party insiders and political analysts predict the number will exceed that this time round and not just due to the expansion of the battlefield, from 71 to 82 constituencies.

Many are expected to be disappointed aspiring candidates or their proxies.

“In the next few days, we can expect to see several politicians quitting their parties because they were not selected as candidates or unhappy with those chosen and decide to contest as Independents,” said Prof Datuk Dr Jeniri Amir, political analyst with Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

“My take is that all of them will lose and many will lose their deposits as well, like what happened in 2011.”

Dr Jeniri said the number of independent candidates could reach 50 and, as was the case before, many will be standing in Bumiputera areas.

Not many Independents have succeeded at the polls, but they can be spoilers who make the difference in closely-contested areas.

In 2011, George Ak Lagong was the only Independent to win, taking the Pelagus seat with a majority of 2,837 to beat BN and PKR contenders.

Sarawak media reported that Dr Roland Dom Mattu, senior vice president of SPDP, a component of BN, has quit the party to contest as an independent in Mulu, one of the 11 new constituencies at stake, for which BN is fielding Datuk Gerawat Gala as a direct candidate.

In a related development today, PKR state vice-chairman Boniface Willy Tumek quit the party after he was not picked as a candidate. He had wanted to contest in Tasik Biru but it is not known if he will contest as an Independent.

Nomination for the state election is on April 25 and polling, May 7. --BERNAMA



Worker applying final touches to a Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) flag ahead of the Sarawak polls. Pix by MUHD ZAABA ZAKERIA.