

SARAWAK CHIEF MINISTER A HIT, BUT BN MAY NOT SWEEP THE POLLS

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KUALA LUMPUR — While opinion polls have shown a significant climb in Sarawak Chief Minister Adenan Satem's approval ratings, they cannot be analysed to mean the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition will make a clean sweep at the state polls in May, said political observers.

The observers said Mr Adenan's popularity with Sarawakians was a long-established fact, and the results of a recent survey by independent pollster Merdeka Center do not necessarily spell doom for the opposition.

Instead, they said Sarawak's 82-seat Legislative Assembly will probably see few changes, with members of the opposition either maintaining their numbers in the House or expanding slightly. "This is because, despite the strong numbers for the Chief Minister (in the survey), the urban voters continue to want to see a strong opposition that can perform a check and balance on his administration," Merdeka Center director Ibrahim Suffian told Malay Mail Online.

In the survey released on Tuesday, the independent pollster found 81 per cent of the 815 respondents interviewed between Jan 20 and 26 this year were satisfied with Mr Adenan's leadership. He was given 74 per cent on his approval scorecard last year, a little over a year after he assumed the post of Chief Minister after Abdul Taib Mahmud stepped down.

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) political analyst Dr Jeniri Amir said Mr Adenan has been playing his cards right since succeeding Mr Abdul Taib.

"He has brought back English to be the official language (together with Bahasa Malaysia) and allowed Sarawak Christians the right to use (the Arabic word) of 'Allah' to refer to their God," he said.

"He goes down to the wet market, jokes with the people and also met up with (former national sprinter) Watson Nyambek when news about his financial situation was made known ... the people like this and so up goes his popularity. But to say BN is going to have a landslide victory, I don't think so. People in urban areas want to see this check and balance," he told Malay Mail Online.

Universiti Putra Malaysia political analyst Professor Dr Jayum A Jawan also disagreed when asked if the survey meant that BN would see a bigger win in the state's 11th election.

He said the opposition pact would still see a strong presence in the urban seats, adding that the opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP) has managed to garner support from the Chinese community in some of these areas. "I think BN will win two-thirds (majority in the Sarawak election), but the oppositions will also see an increase in seats. I can see that the opposition will bag about 18 seats," he predicted.

According to Merdeka Center, many Sarawakians polled found Mr Adenan had introduced "significant" changes to the hornbill state since he took over as Chief Minister. One of the policies he introduced that earned him the most accolades was the decision to retain English as the official language of the Sarawak administration, along with Bahasa Malaysia.

A notable 83 per cent of respondents agreed with the move, found the survey. Other decisions that endeared Mr Adenan to Sarawakians were his efforts to recognise the Unified Examination Certificate, which gained him support from 68 per cent of respondents, while his decision to allow Sarawak Christians to use the Arabic word "Allah" to refer to their God earned him 53 per cent of support.

In the 2011 Sarawak polls, BN swept up 55 of 71 seats up for contest while the DAP won 12, Parti Keadilan Rakyat three and an independent candidate won one seat. This year, there will be 82 seats contested.

Nominations for Sarawak's 11th state elections have been set for April 25 while polling will take place on May 7. the malay mail online