

SARAWAK ANALYSTS SEE LIMITED CHANCES OF OPPOSITION PARTIES IN STATE ELECTION

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KUALA LUMPUR – February 29, 2016: Political analysts are so far in agreement that the performance of national-based opposition parties in the coming 11th Sarawak election will not be much better than previously .

It was not much help that state PKR vice-chairman See Chee How last week confirmed that the negotiations on several overlapping seats in the state are still ongoing.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Adenan Satem has confirmed that Barisan Nasional (BN) candidates will be announced next month.

Sarawak-based analysts contacted by **The Mole** expected the opposition parties' chances of winning seats to be restricted due to Adenan's current popularity, as well as their inability to unite and ensure 'one-on-one' battles against BN.

Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS) senior research fellow Associate Professor Dr Faisal S. Hazis said that the opposition parties' chance of winning is only limited to urban areas.

Faisal, who is currently attached to Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) added that the only realistic hope for the opposition is on DAP to retain its 70 per cent Chinese votes bank at urban constituencies such as Kuching.

The analyst also said that it would be tough for the national-based PKR, DAP, Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah) and even Pas as the people of Sarawak have begun to warm up to Adenan's popularity as the chief minister.

Faisal said with just two years as chief minister, Adenan had captured the hearts of Sarawakians when he made popular decisions such as abolishing the toll collection of Tun Salahuddin Bridge.

The analyst added that the opposition parties appeared unable to present a better narrative to counter Adenan's moves to promote better autonomy and Sarawak nationalism.

He said they also seem to lack cohesion after being indecisive in seat distribution and squabbling over marginal seats.

Whereas for local based opposition parties, the likes of Sarawak Worker's Party (SWP), Faisal commented that the party would likely be restricted to just retaining its Iban majority seats.

Associate Professor Dr Jeniri Amir of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) also foretells that overall; the opposition Pakatan Harapan (PH) of DAP, PKR and Amanah would not stand much chance to win over the rural voters.

"DAP will retain its status quo in urban seats, namely in Kuching, while PKR would probably retain its status quo. The oppositions will continue to win support in constituencies that they won in the last election, but nothing more than that.

"It is rather difficult for them to win the suburban seats, let alone the rural seats, even though they have campaigns such as 'Impian Sarawak'. Those areas that they are aiming are still BN strongholds," he added.

In addition, he noted that there will be an uphill battle for PKR at its Ba'Kelalan constituency, as BN have been planning to place "a sturdy candidate" against state PKR chief Baru Bian.

Jeniri also commented that Pas would not be successful as the seats they are aiming strongholds of BN's Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB).

The analyst however stressed the importance of Adenan to solve the impasse between Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) and its splinter United People's Party (UPP) as well as that between Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP) and Parti Tenaga Rakyat Sarawak (Teras).

Jeniri added, the continuous infighting will cause BN having to deal with possible split of votes and three-cornered fight in Chinese majority areas, which will be benefiting the DAP that is eyeing SUPP's and SPDP's seats.

Associate Professor Dr Ahi Sarok of Unimas corroborated Jeniri's observation, adding that the recent re-delineation exercise will definitely favour BN.

He however pointed out that the new Batu Kitang constituency that is separated from DAP's Kota Sentosa and Batu Kawa will probably still be won by that party.

Ahi also cautioned that the opposition parties' campaign of "a vote for Adenan is a vote for Najib" appeared to have been gaining traction in several rural areas.

Nevertheless, the analyst commented that there is a caveat for the national-based opposition parties, as the locals are campaigning for "Sarawak for Sarawakians", which might not go down well with the campaign strategies of especially national-based PKR, DAP, Amanah and Pas.