LOOKING at the events in the state in recent weeks, it appears that the worst enemies for some Barisan Nasional parties this parliamentary elections are themselves.

The polls, which could now be held sooner than expected, will certainly test every party’s resolve and all the bickering can only be expected to come to a head as the day of reckoning arrives.

Virtually all state Barisan parties have their own issues to deal with — some more than others — but the situation seems to be most dire in SPDP.

Leaders and ex-leaders of the party have no qualms about fighting their battles publicly and what’s more, doing it all in the name of Barisan Nasional.

Problems in the party started after party president Tan Sri William Mawan replaced Datuk Sylvester Entri Muran as the secretary-general during a meeting in February 2010. Entri walked out of the meeting followed by four other SPDP elected representatives who would eventually call themselves the “Group of Five (GS).”

After much back and forth, Mawan finally decided to sack the five end of last year, leaving them with no reason to hold back their frustrations.

Two of SPDP’s four parliamentary seats that could suffer as a result of the ongoing SPDP-GS quarrel are Baram and Mas Gading.

Marudi, one of the two state seats under Baram, is represented by the main protagonist in the conflict,
Entri, who has been very vocal in his criticisms against the SPDP leadership.

The leadership is certainly worried about how Entri could affect the Baram incumbent Datuk Jacob Dungau Sagan who is likely to defend the seat in the coming polls. It also does not help that Jacob, the Deputy International Trade and Industry Minister, has come under Opposition fire recently for timber concessions.

The incumbent will most likely face a fresh candidate from PKR in the polls. The opposition party has identified a young lawyer and pastor, Roland Engan, for the seat.

"We chose Roland before the quarrels in SPDP started but their problems will surely help us," said a PKR leader.

Over in Mas Gading, the battle lines were drawn last Saturday when SPDP, the G5 and DAP held separate events in the constituency simultaneously. Quite literally, it was a night of DAP against BN against BN (G5).

The G5 event at Redeems Centre in Singai did not hold back in backing the Mas Gading incumbent, Datuk Dr Tiki Lafe, for the seat. It is no secret that SPDP will not be re-nominating Dr Tiki, who was once the party’s vice-president, this general election. Interestingly, one of those invited to speak at the G5 event was PRS secretary general Datuk Wilfred Nissom, adding weight to talk that SPDP and PRS have a strained relationship.

"It is important to note that Datuk Dr Tiki and Datuk Peter Nansian (Tasik Biru assemblyman) are elected reps of the Barisan so it is right for us to support them. What are they doing at the Civic Centre if they say they are for Barisan?" said Wilfred, referring to the SPDP dinner at the Bau Civic Centre.

And as if on cue, Mawan said at the Civic Centre that state Barisan parties must stick together. "I believe that if one party gains, the whole coalition gains, and if one party fails, the whole coalition falls."

Well, it looks like the only one who could gain from the quarrel is DAP’s Mordi Bimol, who is aiming to be one of the first rural DAP elected representatives.

The Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) graduate, who had worked for a while as a journalist, has been making his presence felt in Mas Gading for a few years now.

SPDP, on the other hand, is expected to propose a new face, Anthony Noge, as the candidate. Noge, who is Sarawak Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (Salcra) deputy general manager, was introduced to the audience at Civic Centre by SPDP deputy president Datuk Seri Tong King Sing.

It is quite possible that Mas Gading could be looking at at least a three-cornered fight this polls. If Dr Tiki is dropped by Barisan, there is every possibility that he could go at it alone.

Another Barisan party that could suffer as a result of internal squabbles is, of course, SUPP. It is believed that the Registrar of Societies (ROS) is holding back its decision on the legality of the recent party election until after the polls. Miri MP Datuk Seri Peter Chin had gone from wanting to retire from the party to being elected unopposed as SUPP president all within a year.

But as far as Sibu SUPP chief Datuk Seri Wong Soon Koh and his group—comprising the majority of SUPP’s elected representatives—are concerned, the party election last December was “unconstitutional” because of alleged wrongdoings during the branch elections.

In the meantime, however, Chin has been accorded his place in the state and Federal Barisan Nasional supreme council. That said, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak can expect two lists of proposed candidates from SUPP—one from Chin and the other, Wong.

As it is, the candidacy in at least three out of SUPP’s six seats are still up in the air. They are Bandar Kuching, Sibu and Miri. Bandar Kuching and Sibu are now represented by DAP; while in Miri, there’s talk that Chin could step down to focus on his responsibilities as SUPP president. Chin’s political secretary, Datuk Sebastian Ting, is rumoured to be taking over.

Sibu will definitely be a hotter seat than Bandar Kuching and although the two factions in the party are not on speaking terms, they are certainly aware of their limitations.

Sibu SUPP has already recommended Temenggong Vincent Lau for Sibu and Datuk Tiong Thai King to defend Lanang in the coming polls and it is unlikely that Chin will challenge the branch’s recommendations.

Indeed, political pundits are expecting an unspoken truce between Chin and Wong for the polls but it would be a veryickle one. All it takes is for someone to say something out of turn to ignite the quarrels again.

Wong Ho Leng and Chong Chienes, the current MPs of Sibu and Bandar Kuching respectively, are expected to defend their seats and a divided SUPP has a slim chance of winning against them.

As for PRS, its president Tan Sri Dr James Masing has said it himself, although cryptically, that there were “enemies within.” PRS may just be dealing with some familiar spirits that have haunted it since the break-up of PBDS.

PRS’s Selangau and Hulu Rajang seats are the ones to watch. More so in Selangau, where it is said that a familiar Barisan-friendly face could be making a comeback.

These goings on in the state Barisan certainly raise questions about the health of the coalition. Of late, it appears that the personalities have become more important than their parties and that the coalition is willing to compromise its principles for the sake of seats.

Even Mawan is himself beginning to question this. “When you sack your members for being indiscipline you say it is in the interest of Barisan but when others do the same you say it is not good for Barisan. That’s not solidarity because you only think what you do is right and what others do is wrong,” he said during the function last Saturday.

It certainly appears that Barisan has its hands full this polls because not only does it have to do battle with the Opposition, it also has to face itself.

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— TAN SRI WILLIAM MAWAN