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PBB - Contest

ABANG ABU BAKAR UNLIKELY TO PULL OUT OF RACE, SAYS AIDE

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 13 (Bernama) -- Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha is unlikely to pull out of the contest for the deputy presidency of the Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) at the party polls on Aug 28, an aide said today.

He said as of now, Abang Abu Bakar would "fight it out" in the three-cornered contest despite only getting a single nomination.

Abang Abu Bakar, one of the two incumbent Deputy Presidents of PBB, the backbone party of the ruling Sarawak Barisan Nasional coalition, is facing a challenge from two party vice presidents and state ministers Datuk Adenan Satem and Datuk Abang Johari Tun Openg.

The announcement of the contest, the first time for the post in 12 years, was made by another PBB Deputy President and Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Alfred Jabu at the close of nominations for the party polls in Kuching yesterday.

The three-day PBB Convention from Aug 26 will be opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The last time the party's No 2 post was contested was in 1986 when Abang Abu Bakar triumphed over then Education Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud.

The aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the fact that Abang Abu Bakar only managed to secure a single nomination was "no surprise".

Asked to explain why this was so, he said: " There is pressure for Abang Abu Bakar to withdraw from the race as a "face saving" move and the pressure was so intense that many divisions which traditionally were backing him have backed out this time around".

He said because of such a pressure, even Abang Abu Bakar's own division of Rejang did not nominate him to defend the post and instead he managed to secure the sole nomination from the Limbang division.

In comparison, Adenan, the state Agriculture and Food Industries Minister received 32 nominations and Abang Johari, the Industrial Development Minister obtained 14 nominations.

Meanwhile, attempts over the past two days to get Abang Abu Bakar himself to comment on the latest developments surrounding the party polls, expected to be the most exciting since 1986, proved fruitless.

" He's being kept busy making arrangements for his daughter's wedding scheduled this Sunday," said the aide.

Answering a question, the aide refused to say where the pressure for Abang Abu Bakar to withdraw from the race had come from.

But he dismissed suggestions that the outcome of the contest for Abang Abu Bakar was a foregone conclusion given his narrowest possible margin of nomination.

" Don't judge the coming polls based only on nominations. Our feedback shows that there are many divisions which decided not to nominate him but how the delegates will vote is another matter altogether.

" This is true not only of PBB but other political parties as well. After all, the vote is secret," he said.

He admitted that Abang Abu Bakar was facing an uphill battle to defend his post, but added that the "barometer" might change in the two weeks run-up to the party polls.

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