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Taib-Umno

UMNO'S ENTRY INTO SARAWAK INEVITABLE, SAYS TAIB

KUALA LUMPUR, April 20 (Bernama) -- Umno's entry into Sarawak is inevitable but it has to wait until the people of the state are ready, said Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud.

"If the people feel that we ought to be part of a bigger political party, then you will have Umno," he said in an interview published in the maiden issue of "New Reality", Sarawak's first ever news magazine which Taib will launch in Kuching tomorrow.

Asked whether there is a possibility that Umno will ever come to Sarawak, Taib said: "Of course there is. It is just a matter of time. Politics is a response to the aspirations of the people on the ground, not just at the top".

As to the question of when, Taib said "it's not just yet." Sarawak is the only Malaysian state where the largest party in the ruling coalition has to make its presence.

"I think the time will come. People will feel (that we ought to be part of a bigger party) once they start feeling that it does not matter anymore whether they are Iban, Bidayuh or Orang Ulu and that they do not have to be Malay to join Umno," Taib said.

He said that the time would come when the people of Sarawak no longer had to fight very hard for the state because they would already be equal to the more developed states such as Selangor and Johor.

"When our economic structure is almost similar and when policies announced in Kuala Lumpur need not be amended before being implemented in Sarawak, that would be the time when the people of Sarawak no longer need a state-level party.

"But today nobody is holding that kind of view yet. I wish they did," he said.

Taib said when he last spoke to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on the issue, he told the prime minister that it would take Sarawak probably 10 years to see that the people would understand and thus develop a better outlook.

He said for a merger or assimilation into Umno, he was sure that the leaders of both Umno and Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) which he heads, would not like to see PBB become weaker after the merger.

In the interview, Taib explained the problems that now stood in the way of Umno's entry into the state.

If there was to be a merger with Umno, it ought not to involve only the PBB as it would have to mean getting the Sarawak National Party (Snap) and probably the Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS) onto the Umno bandwagon.

Then there is also the question about the fate of the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), the second largest coalition partner after the PBB.

As Taib put it: "What will happen to SUPP then?. We cannot leave SUPP to continue functioning as a state-level party while the PBB becomes part of a national-level party."

He also argued that given these circumstances, SUPP must be given time to see whether or not it could become part of a national-level Chinese-based party.

"Only then will you have national political play in Sarawak. Short of that, you will have people talking about state politics and national politics. That is unhealthy," he added.

But he said the people who now wanted to bring Umno into the state were

not the Umno leaders themselves but those whom he described as rejected politicians and political has-beens.

"These people are even printing Umno membership forms and are already trying to distribute them. They are telling the people, on all sorts of pretext, why they should sign up.

"The next thing they will tell the Umno leaders in Kuala Lumpur is that: Yes, we have thousands and thousands of applications. Therefore you must come to Sarawak", he said.

-- BERNAMA

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