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Sabah-PBS

DOMPOK UNPERTURBED AS PBS TURNS THE HEAT ON

PENAMPANG, March 9 (Bernama) -- An announcement blared out to a crowd of cheering Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) supporters asking a certain car owner to remove his vehicle which was blocking the car of a woman who was about to give birth.

It was like a "commercial break" in between a series of speeches by PBS leaders at the Hongkod Koisaan, the Kadazandusun Cultural Centre in Penampang here on Sunday night.

The master of ceremony repeated the car number a few times, saying the woman had gone into labour and had to be taken to hospital.

"Ini baru penyokong setia PBS. Sudah tahu mahu beranak pun datang sokong parti (This woman is indeed a PBS loyalist. Even though she's due to give birth, yet she has come here to support)," another party supporter was overheard as saying.

The Hongkod Koisaan is the venue of most major PBS functions, including its general assembly, and the celebration this time was to mark the party's 14th anniversary.

The crowd, which started to stream into the hall as early as 6pm, did not budge from their seats, apparently waiting for PBS president Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan to get his turn to speak. And he only did so half an hour before midnight.

As the cultural centre lies within the Moyog constituency, the anniversary doubled up as a major campaign effort for the PBS candidate, Datuk Clarence Bongkos Malakun.

Moyog has been dubbed the "mother" of all battles for the 12 Kadazandusun seats in the Sabah election to be held this weekend.

Saddam Hussein's famous phrase during the Gulf War was used by the media mainly because the political future of Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok is at stake and rests with Moyog's 22,616 voters.

Dompok has said he will quit politics if the voters reject him. And PBS leaders who addressed the crowd seized the opportunity to tell their supporters to "pension off" Dompok once and for all.

Speaker after speaker pulled no punches in their personal attack against Dompok, a former PBS leader himself who left the party soon after the 1994 election with several other PBS elected assemblymen. They defected to the BN camp, an event that led to the famous collapse of the PBS government.

It was at this very hall almost five years ago that Pairin launched the PBS campaign in Moyog for the 1994 polls in support of Dompok.

The scene was repeated. But this time around in a typically Sabah reverse situation, Pairin was there at the same place in support of Bongkos, one of Dompok's three challengers.

First it was Bongkos' turn to turn the heat on Dompok.

"Even the prime minister has offered Dompok a safer seat than Moyog. He turned it down because he said he was born, bred and educated in Moyog. This means Dr Mahathir Mohamad is not confident of Dompok's chances. By the way I, too, was born, bred and educated in Moyog," said Bongkos to loud applause.

Hearing speeches from six PBS personalities as the night wore on left one without a doubt that the campaign against Dompok's bid to retain the seat had indeed turned very personal.

The federal government was also their target.

"Where is the development promised. The BN promised to give us "Sabah Baru" (new Sabah) but where is the new Sabah they are talking about," asked Bongkos, a former District Officer of Panampang, dubbed by the Kadazandusuns as the heartland of their "nationalism".

The crowd got worked up by the emotionally-charged speeches of the PBS personalities. Besides Pairin and Bongkos, the others who spoke were former state Finance Minister Datuk Mohd Noor Mansoor, PBS Deputy President Datuk Wong Phin Chung, Member of Parliament for Tuaran Yunof Marinking and PBS candidate for the nearby Petagas constituency, Uda Sulai.

Everytime Dompok's and the names of a few other PBS assemblymen who were accused of "betraying" the party in 1994 were mentioned, the crowd responded with "katak (frog), pembelot (betrayers)".

"PBS was killed by these big frogs. This time we'll teach them a lesson," blurted Wong.

Mohd Noor, who served as minister during the Berjaya government in the mid-1970's to 1980's, has lost none of his famous oratorical skills.

He said the PBS did not recognise Dompok as chief minister because "he is occupying the chair which should rightly be Datuk Pairin's", referring to the 1994 defections affair that toppled Pairin after only three weeks on office then.

Pairin's message was his standard campaign fare -- asking PBS's arch rival the Barisan Nasional (BN) to "respect the democratic wishes of the people of Sabah."

To back this up, he cited a passage from a book written by late prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman on the same subject.

But Dompok himself is unperturbed by the PBS mud-slinging.

In his campaign speeches, Dompok has cleverly stayed clear of such tactics himself against PBS leaders, in favour of his "development agenda".

"PBS is desperate and has resorted to bully tactics," he told Bernama while campaigning in his Moyog constituency last night.

"PBS knows that it is losing support in Kadazandusun areas and now spreads lies like the BN has not brought any development. They ignore the new highways that we we have built in the last five years although their leaders use the highway everyday."

Dompok said the Kadazandusuns' choice had become clearer than ever.

"BN is development while PBS is sentiment.

"Development is winning," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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