

02/03/1999

The final line-ups for parties will be known today

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NOMINATION centres in Sabah open their doors at nine this morning when "who's contesting where and for which party" will be known. A sea of posters and bunting will accompany candidates, some of whom will be independents.

In the meantime, some realignments, intriguing twists and turns unfolded yesterday.

While despised by some, party hopping as evidenced at the headquarters of Parti Bersekutu yesterday, might at some point, bring a reunion of sorts.

Seated beside Datuk Harris Salleh, leader of Bersekutu, at a Press conference, was Datuk Yahya Lampong, a stalwart in the era of the Berjaya government under Harris.

Yahya, who rejoined Umno after Berjaya and lately had been head of the Tanjung Aru Umno division, was back with Harris.

He will now contest the Muslim-majority seat of Kuala Penyu, southwest of Kota Kinabalu, under the ticket of Parti Bersekutu which is fielding candidates in all 48 constituencies.

Another old associate of Harris, Abdillah Abdul Hamid has also left Umno to join Bersekutu. Like Yahya, Abdillah is a former Deputy Federal Minister and he will be fielded by Bersekutu in Lahad Datu.

This latest turn of events on the eve of nomination forced Harris to adjust his line-up which had been finalised earlier.

"We accept anybody," said Harris, adding that if the newcomers had the potential to help in the development of Sabah, they would be considered as candidates.

While Harris spoke in a measured tone, Yahya provided the fireworks. "Have you been to England?," he asked a reporter. Yahya glared at the same reporter later, telling him not to misquote him.

"I am not fighting for myself," he intoned. Continuing, he said: "I am fighting for the rights of the future generations.

"This has got nothing to do with Dr Mahathir (Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) ... it is just a system he implemented here."

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who made another visit to Kota Kinabalu yesterday, said he was not aware of the development involving Yahya and Abdillah but said Umno members who defected faced expulsion.

Responding to the defection, Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, the Chief Minister and State BN chairman, said since these politicians made their move after knowing the line-up of BN candidates, "it is better for them to leave."

Dompok himself has also benefited from the changing situation. President of Pasok, Peter Oyong Lobinjang, who was planning to challenge the CM in Moyog, went to Dompok's house to declare his support for him.

Lobinjang said other Pasok candidates too would not be contesting. But they are not leaving the party.

Probably accustomed to the fluid nature of Sabah politics, patrons of a nightspot in Kota Kinabalu were told to put up with politicians changing parties.

"Everybody makes mistakes," was written on a white board at the premises.

In a place where voters are said to be independent and where it is common to hear politicians describing this or that person as a "bigger

frog", analysts said the immediate impact of Yahya's and Abdillah's defection could not be ascertained.

Harris had predicted that Bersekutu would sweep 40 of the 48 seats while observers are more inclined to see Harris's party in a spoiler's role.

As the real battle begins today, the BN is quietly confident of a good overall showing. A source said the latest development in Moyog, Dompok's seat since 1986 and a stronghold of Parti Bersekutu Sabah, had been comforting.

"On Sunday night, some 1,000 turned out to hear Dompok speak. And the CM has been getting calls from community leaders pledging support," the source added. Dompok, meanwhile, released the BN manifesto yesterday.

He said leading the BN to victory at the polls would be a "proud moment in my life."

Until late yesterday, all attention was on PBS. None of its leaders could be reached for insight into its line-up which has not been announced.

With many hoping the eventual winner will get an absolute majority this time, hustings in the next 10 days will help decide the final equation. For now, equations of anything from 65:35, or 40:60 or 50:50 in favour of this party or that party, get quoted all the time.

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