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The issues that arise after party's strong showing in Sabah poll

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ON the hot tarmac at the Kota Kinabalu airport, while waiting for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday, the soft-spoken Datuk Markus Majihi made a few thought-provoking suggestions.

"Akar Bersatu can be dissolved and its members join Umno," said Markus, 39, Akar secretary-general who had quit the party and, on May 1, applied to join Umno.

Markus said the other small Kadazandusun parties could do likewise as Umno accepts all Bumiputeras in Sabah.

To the head of a think-tank, it would not be a surprise if other non-Muslim leaders like Markus joined Umno.

These comments are some of the burgeoning ideas and theories just two months after the Umno-inspired BN victory in the March 12-13 State election.

Managing success has not been entirely a straightforward affair. There has been some restlessness.

A number of key appointments had not been made, such as the heads of government agencies and most prominently, the powerful post of director of the Sabah Foundation.

"Assemblymen not included in the State administration want to know what is in store for them," said an observer.

The feeling is that the wait is to accommodate the defeated leaders of other component parties. Many believe State BN leaders would be consulting Dr Mahathir on this issue during his two-day visit to Sabah.

In the post-election period, there has been some rethinking among some sections on certain core issues, after the impressive showing by Umno in the State election and the dismal performance of Akar and a few others.

Akar lost both the seats it contested. So did Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah led by a Deputy Chief Minister under the Parti Bersatu Sabah Government that ruled Sabah from 1985 to 1994.

Tan Sri Bernard Dompok's Parti Demokratik Sabah won two seats and, by most people's reckoning, has a better future.

Since the election, and amid the euphoria among the Umno ranks, its divisions have passed resolutions pushing for the rotation system for the Chief Minister's post to be scrapped.

Also, a few Umno divisions have been lobbying for seats previously contested by other BN parties in the general election which must be held by June next year.

What is happening? How are the other component parties taking all these developments?

Petrus Gerunting, a PDS supreme council member who took on PBS strongman Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan in his bastion Tambunan, said PDS members there would like to think that a recent controversial statement by the head of the local Keningau Umno division was a personal opinion.

The divisional leader said Umno could have won Tambunan and two other seats there (Bingkor and Pensiangan) for BN, an inference that, some felt, suggested that not all Umno members had voted for the BN candidates from the other parties.

To Datuk Wilfred Bumburing, the No. 2 in PDS, the lobbying for seats, for example, is premature as the election has not been called.

Also, it has been pointed out that although other component parties collectively won just seven seats, their members must have contributed to

the victory of Umno in all the 24 seats it contested.

This, those watching the latest developments with some anxiety said, was what the BN culture and spirit was all about.

Moreover, any falling out will benefit the PBS in the general election. What are the options then?

The stark reality, said the head of a think-tank, is that many of the candidates from the other component parties were rejected. Thus, the idea of dissolving the smaller parties and its members joining Umno should be explored.

Dr Mohd Yaakub Johari, executive director of the Institute for Development Studies, said this situation was not without precedent. In the Usno days of old, a Kadazandusun party, Upko, was dissolved and its members then joined Usno.

He said more non-Muslim Bumiputeras were warming up to Umno now that the party had produced a non-Muslim State Minister (Datuk Rubin Balang) and an MP (Asmat Nungka).

Markus, however, felt that a powerful Umno might well strengthen PBS as a rallying point for the Kadazandusuns.

Which is why he has this idea about the rotation system for the CM: "Let's see how the Kadazandusuns vote in the general election before a decision is made."

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