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## Defection spins tangled web in Sabah's sticky politics

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THE wheels keep turning for Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan. And he keeps on moving. He was a founder leader of Parti Bersatu Sabah. Then he had a hand in the formation of Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRs), was in Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat Sabah (Akar) before finally returning to PBS.

Yesterday, he announced he was quitting PBS and is likely to rejoin PBRs. It is still vivid in our minds that Jeffrey, as this former Yayasan Sabah director is known, left PBS after winning the Bingkor seat in the 1994 State election.

In March 1994, after the PBS was toppled, he teamed up with Tan Sri Joseph Kurup to form PBRs. Before long, he ditched Kurup to join Akar.

Jeffrey was made a Senator and Deputy Minister in the Federal Cabinet, a post he held until he lost in the 1995 parliamentary election. He was Bingkor assemblyman then. In 1997, he re-joined PBS.

Jeffrey was returned Assemblyman for Bingkor in last year's State election when he defeated Kurup, then Deputy Chief Minister.

But in Sabah politics, there are no permanent enemies.

Jeffrey, founder of the State Government's think-tank Institute for Development Studies, said his "confrontation" with BN had gone on too far. "If we want to reconcile, now is the right time."

Talk of the younger Kitingan ditching his brother emerged again last week on his return from overseas. He went abroad soon after the general election in November.

At the airport to welcome Jeffrey were PBRs deputy president Datuk Laimun Laikim, secretary-general Datuk James Vitales and vice-president Datuk Adib Sigoh. Vitales is also the State Legislative Assembly's Deputy Speaker.

There are also five PBS Assemblymen, Johnny Goh Chin Lok (Inanam), Louis Rampas (Kiulu), Karim Adam (Kundasang), Edward Linggu (Tamparuli) and Atong Mangabis (Matunggong) backing him. "The five YBs' support is intact. They will follow me into the BN fold," Jeffrey said.

This move by Jeffrey is consistent with a paper he wrote in 1993 while under Internal Security Act detention: "As a Malaysian, I should think Malaysian and the politics I play should be Malaysian politics."

He also said his objective was to find a solution to the persistent problems in BN-PBS relations.

Asked yesterday if had met Federal leaders to discuss rejoining the BN component, PBRs, he said he did not wish to talk about "outside discussions".

Pressed for an answer, he said: "The matter (PBS reconciling with BN) had been brought to the Prime Minister by the (PBS) president."

Jeffrey said he had met Pairin and other PBS supreme council members to present his case for a PBS reconciliation with the BN. This was confirmed by Pairin.

However, Pairin refuted claims that he had given blessings to Jeffrey to defect to the BN through PBRs. The former Chief Minister said all PBS assemblymen must respect their pledges to the people when selected as candidates for State and parliamentary elections.

Pairin said all PBS elected representatives had pledged that should they ditch PBS, they would vacate their seats.

"I reminded him (Jeffrey) of this pledge," he said.

This move by Jeffrey to team up with Kurup will boost the number of PBRs

representatives in the State Legislative Assembly. PBRS failed to win any seat in the State election. Kurup is the "lonely cowboy" as his entry is by virtue of being a nominated Assemblyman.

With Jeffrey and the five others joining PBRS, the Kadazandusun and Murut (KDM) party, will have seven Assemblymen. This is more than the three from United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Organisation (Upko), another KDM party.

It is interesting to see the outcome of this latest political development in the KDM-based parties, with each trying to outmanoeuvre the other.

One must remember the State's unique system of rotating the chief ministership among the Muslim Bumiputera, non-Muslim Bumiputera and Chinese communities.

The next Chief Minister, after Datuk Seri Osu Sukam completes his two-year term next March, will be from the non-Muslim Bumiputera quota, to complete about 18 months of the two-year term which Tan Sri Bernard Dompok did not finish when Sabah went to the polls in March last year.

When Osu was made Chief Minister, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said after Osu, a Kadazandusun and Murut leader would step in. Is this the reason for the latest developments in the KDM-based parties?

Will Jeffrey be the next Chief Minister?

(END)