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PBS-Revival (News Focus)

A POLITICAL RESURRECTION FOR PBS, GOOD MOVE BY PAIRIN

By: Newmond Tibin

KOTA KINABALU, Dec 14 (Bernama) -- After an unsuccessful attempt to make inroads into the helm of the state government in the 1999 state election, many political pundits believed that Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) would eventually close shop.

They predicted that the opposition party would suffer a similar fate to the likes of the defunct Usno and Parti Berjaya, once much-vaunted parties which ruled the state alternately for about 10 years each before PBS came into power in 1985.

They also believed that the party led by the former chief minister and the Kadazandusuns' Huguan Siou (paramount leader), Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan, was no longer a force to be reckoned with and was on the threshold of an early political exit.

However, against the odds and in what is seen as a resurrection of PBS, Pairin, being the experienced politician that he is, applied the mathematics of logic to steer his seemingly sinking ship from the deep ocean to a platform where it rightly belongs -- the pool of the Barisan Nasional (BN).

The dramatic turnabout culminated in PBS's decision to rejoin the BN and Pairin himself handed over the party's application to Prime Minister and BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Nov 15, in Putrajaya, and its fate will possibly be known after Adilfitri.

"Pairin is a real politician...he knows what to do in the face of an uncertain future.

"I believe this is good for the people of Sabah...we all love lasting unity and we are happy that at last it prevailed," said PBS Youth chief Almudin Kaida.

He said that the majority of the PBS grassroots supporters, including the youth wing, had supported the move to rejoin the BN to ensure political stability and continued development in the state.

"There were diehard supporters who started distancing themselves from the party after it lost in the 1999 state election but now they are coming back to us, so much so that the party headquarters has run out of membership forms," he said.

Almudin said this was a good indication for the party's future and the youth wing hoped that PBS would continue to be relevant in the state's political arena.

He said it was high time that all sections of society, including political parties, sat together to find ways and means of solving the various problems facing the state, particularly the perennial illegal immigrants.

"Let bygones be bygones. Now we are entering a new chapter...let us be united for the good of the people and the state," Almudin said.

PBS had been a BN component party for about five years until it left the coalition abruptly on the eve of the 1990 general election and teamed up with the now-defunct Parti Melayu Semangat 46.

In outlining the rationale for the PBS's move to return to the BN fold during the party's congress recently, Pairin said: "In the situation that we are in...the globalisation, we need to work together".

Many a people believe that PBS's re-entry into the coalition is the "miracle answer" to the enigma which seemed to prevail in Sabah politics that "once out of power, it would almost be impossible to make a comeback".

This was exactly what happened to the then ruling party, Usno, led by the late Tun Datu Mustapha Datu Harun, and Parti Berjaya under Datuk Harris Salleh, which were forced to close shop after several attempts to make a comeback came to nought.

"I thought that after losing in the 1990 state election and the subsequent parliamentary election, that's the end of PBS," said Lodimun Balantis of Kampung Mangkaladom, Kiulu.

"It never occurred to me that Pairin could still salvage the party after one by one, its elected assemblymen defected to the BN soon after the election...it is a wise move," he added.

He said PBS' decision to rejoin BN augured well for the state as it could create a good political environment, thus enabling the government to focus more on developing the state.

Before this, in what is seen as a sign of bad luck for PBS, eight of its former assemblymen had defected to the ruling state Barisan Nasional through its component parties -- Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRs) and Umno -- soon after the state election.

PBS's predicament was further aggravated by the recent defection of its stalwart, Moyog assemblyman Datuk Clarence Bongkos Malakun, to Sabah-based BN component United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Murut Organisation (UPKO).

The defections proved fatal for PBS which was already weakened by a series of defections of its leader since its inception in 1985.

Now, only eight of the 17 elected assemblymen remain steadfast to the party and these included Pairin loyalists -- deputy presidents Dr Maximus Ongkili and Dr Yee Moh Chai, and secretary-general Radin Malleh.

Commenting on the matter, Land and Cooperative Development Minister Tan Sri Kasitah Gaddam said that despite the general contention that PBS's support was now "declining", it still commanded significant support.

"Pairin, by virtue of being the Huguan Siou or paramount leader of the Kadazandusuns, still commands strong support among the non-Muslim bumiputeras in Sabah," he said.

With the re-entry of PBS into the BN, the unpredictable political scenario in Sabah is set to eclipse and a stable state government looms instead.

-- BERNAMA

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