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Sarawak-Abu Bakar

ABANG ABU BAKAR GROUP TO FIELD 45 CANDIDATES IN SARAWAK ELECTION

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 7 (Bernama) -- Former Defence Minister Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha said a group headed by him will contest in 45 state constituencies in the Sarawak election, which is expected to be held next month.

In this respect, he said the group, which will be contesting as independent candidates, is part of the move to bring Umno to Sarawak even though attempts so far have failed.

"If our string of independent candidates win, naturally we will head the Sarawak government. By then, if Umno is ready to spread its wings to Sarawak, we and thousands of Umno supporters in Sarawak will welcome it with open arms," he said in a statement issued here.

In the nine-page statement, the former deputy president of Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB), a major component of the Barisan Nasional (BN) government in Sarawak, also revealed details of the moves he made as far back as 1983 to enable Umno to spread its wings to the state.

Abang Abu Bakar, who left the PBB in January last year, said that until now the people of Sarawak had no opportunity whatsoever to hold a referendum to show their stand pertaining to the issue of Umno's entry to the state.

According to him, the plan to hold a gathering of 60,000 pro tem members of the Sarawak Umno at the Padang Merdeka in Kuching on Feb 27 last year did not materialise because it failed to get the approval of the police and State Secretary.

"I am confident that in the coming election, the issue of Umno's entry will be a major agenda in the eyes and mind of the voters in Sarawak," he said, while stressing that his involvement this time in the election is not a personal agenda against Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud.

Abang Abu Bakar said he was involved in the move to table in the PBB General Assembly in 1983 and 1986 the motions on Umno's entry, which were unanimously accepted by the delegates but until today have yet to be implemented.

"The fact is that when I was not nominated to contest in the parliamentary election in November 1999, I was already contemplating to retire from the political arena. But when I went back to Kuching in early 2000, many delegations from all over Sarawak insisted that I supported the move of wanting to bring Umno to Sarawak.

"Since I was involved in the tabling of the motions on Umno's entry in the PBB General Assembly in 1983 and 1986, this group begged me to carry on with this effort from the outside of the PBB," he said.

The present term of the state government ends in November this year and according to speculations, the 62-seat Sarawak State Legislative Assembly is expected to be dissolved next month to pave way for the state election.

On the status of his group's candidates in the election, Abang Abu Bakar said that they are not the opposition candidates.

"If we are the opposition, surely we will not take the trouble to bring Umno to Sarawak. We wish to fight for the rights of the people and to unite the Bumiputera, non-Bumiputera and the minority groups by replacing leaders who fail to fulfil duties and trust given by the people of Sarawak," he said.

On Umno, Abang Abu Bakar said Prime Minister and Umno President Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had when opening the PBB General Assembly in 1998

announced that actually it was the party's intention to spread its wings to Sarawak.

According to Abang Abu Bakar, Dr Mahathir told the assembly that it was up to the people of Sarawak themselves to find the best approach and option as to how Umno could establish a foothold in the state.

He said his group, which is popularly known as "Parti Bebas" (independent party) or "Kumpulan Bebas Abang Abu" (Abang Abu's independent group), had since the end of last year made adequate preparations to face the election.

"The longer the election is delayed, the stronger will be our machinery at the grassroot level," he said.

Abang Abu Bakar said his group will champion the people's rights which "are being eroded by the policy of the state government."

"The policy on the customary right land of the Bumiputeras is our major issue. The decision of the state government to abolish the customary right land through several amendments to the land laws has placed the Bumiputeras in Sarawak in a disadvantage. In fact, the power to take over land also places the non-Bumiputeras in the towns and surrounding areas at a disadvantage."

"Actually this land issue will be the biggest issue in the election this time," said Abang Abu Bakar who claimed that many people in the state had tasted the "bitter experience" after their land or that of their family or close friends were acquired through unfair means and compensation.

He also touched on privatised projects, of the Public Works Department and Land and Survey Department in the state, that were "a waste of the people's money" which his group would review if they win the election.

"The plan to relocate government departments to rented buildings and office spaces of certain group in the private sector and allocating the former sites to property developers with vested interest will also be reviewed," he said.

--BERNAMA  
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