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Jeffrey-Sook (News Focus)

JEFFREY TRIGGERS POSSIBLE "SAI LANG BATTLE" IN SOOK

KOTA KINABALU, Sept 22 (Bernama) -- Kampung Rimbayan in Keningau, about 80 kilometers from here, is a quiet place that is rarely heard of.

However, last Sunday this tiny rural village was jolted when controversial Bingkor State Assemblyman Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan dropped a bombshell -- declaring that he might contest in Sook in the next State elections as a "Barisan Nasional (BN) independent candidate."

Understandably, it is quite common for any politician to contest any election on any ticket but Dr Jeffrey's move in wanting to contest in Sook instead of defending his Bingkor seat has taken many by surprise.

And with the State elections drawing near, this development could be a prelude to many more elements of surprise as the State BN Government braces itself for a clean sweep of the 60 State seats at stake in the coming elections.

The question being asked is whether Dr Jeffrey would be given a chance to stand as an "independent" BN candidate in Sook.

Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman, who is also State BN chairman, dismissed it saying: "There is no such thing as a BN independent.

"We support only candidates from the BN (component parties)...we don't support independents or independent candidates from the BN."

That means that the political future of Dr Jeffrey, who is without a political party, is hanging in the balance. It could well be over.

The predominantly Kadazandusun Murut Sook constituency used to be represented by the present Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRs) president, Tan Sri Joseph Kurup, in the State Legislative Assembly before the seat was removed during the re-delineation of electoral boundaries in 1994.

However, it was reinstated following the re-delineation exercise early this year. Under the exercise, Sabah, with 48 State and 20 Parliamentary seats now, gets an additional 12 State and five Parliamentary seats.

The additional State seats are Sook, Karambunai, Luyang, Kapayan, Membakut, Paginatan, Liawan, Gum-Gum, Tungku, Bugaya, Apas and Tanjung Batu, while the five Parliamentary seats are Kota Kinabalu, Kimanis, Pensiangan, Batu Sapi and Kalabakan.

Going by what Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said during the recent PBRs congress in Keningau, that the party "will not be forgotten in the coming State elections", many anticipate Kurup to be chosen to contest in Sook on a BN ticket.

"Assuming that Dr Jeffrey is not allowed to contest as a BN candidate and he goes ahead as an independent candidate, then I think it will be a showdown between him and Kurup," said a veteran local political observer, Iskandar Martin Gayo.

"If that happens, it will be a "sai lang" (all out) battle for them. Both are capable leaders and are known to the voters in the area."

At one time, Dr Jeffrey was Kurup's deputy in the PBRs before being sacked on July 15, last year, following a power-struggle in the party.

Both had then claimed to have won the president's post but the Registrar of Societies later declared Kurup as the rightful PBRs president.

-- BERNAMA

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