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Leading BN to a clean sweep in state elections not beyond Sabah Umno

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SABAH Umno is at its strongest and is poised to lead the State Barisan Nasional to a landslide victory in the next State elections expected to be held at any time before March next year.

Within a span of just over 12 years since Umno spread its wings to Sabah, the party has successfully made the State one of its bastions.

With 418,679 registered members and 5,313 branches, Sabah Umno has the second largest number of members after Johor.

"This speaks volumes about the unity, commitment and tenacity of the Sabah Umno leadership and members," said Sabah Umno liaison committee chairman Datuk Musa Aman.

Stressing that unity within Sabah Umno was stronger than ever, Musa said even if there were minor differences, that was part and parcel of being in politics.

The ground-breaking for Sabah Umno's 12-storey building by Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad recently chalked another milestone in the history of the party in Sabah.

Musa said Umno had emerged as the leading party in the State due to the hard work and sacrifices made by past and present Umno leaders.

In the 1999 State elections, Sabah Umno won all the 24 seats it contested and it was expected to repeat the feat in the coming State elections.

In the absence of a credible opposition party following the return of the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) into the BN early last year, a clean sweep of all the 60 State seats was within reach.

The State BN should also have no problem delivering all the 25 parliamentary seats.

Parliament recently approved an additional 12 State and five parliamentary constituencies for Sabah.

With the creation of the new constituencies, the number of seats to be contested by Sabah Umno is expected to increase.

In fact, some State BN leaders have not ruled out the possibility that the BN will win unopposed in some areas.

"We (Umno) are ready to be the driving force in ensuring the success of the BN in the elections," said Musa, who is Chief Minister and State BN chairman.

Under Musa's able leadership, Sabah Umno has successfully conducted a series of election dry runs at the divisional levels to ensure a reliable election machinery.

Despite the optimism of a resounding BN victory, there is a lingering worry that certain individuals in the State BN will turn against the party if they are not chosen as candidates.

This is hinted in Musa's answer when asked whether Sabah Umno could repeat its 100 per cent victory in 1999 in the coming State elections.

"Personally, I think that can be done provided Umno members abide by and support any decisions taken by the leadership," he said.

History has shown that Umno will have difficulties if those who are not selected as candidates and their supporters resorted to action detrimental to the party, such as sabotaging the party's election machinery.

Another likely problem that the BN has to be wary of is over-confidence and complacency among its members.

The readmission of the PBS into the BN would not necessarily guarantee

smooth sailing for the BN as the opposition parties in Sabah are likely to field a common candidate to avoid a split in votes.

Local-based Parti Pasok and Parti Bersekutu have openly declared their willingness to form an electoral understanding with peninsula-based Parti Keadilan Nasional and DAP.

The BN must hold its feet firmly on the ground as taking the Opposition lightly could possibly spell disaster.

The ruling coalition can take comfort in the warm and cordial relations among the State BN parties.

Musa said the relationship was based on mutual respect and understanding of the intricacies and complexity of Sabah politics.

"We all know that we need each other to develop the State and bring progress to the people," said Musa, adding that the excellent working relationship had brought about political stability in the State.

Besides Umno, the other component members of the State BN are PBS, Upko, PBRS, SAPP, LDP, MCA, Gerakan and MIC.

Sabah Umno's preparation for the next State and general elections would temporarily be held back during the four-day Umno general assembly beginning on June 18.

Musa said Sabah Umno would not be bringing up any specific issues at the assembly and would instead support the presidential address on the economy, religion and education.

All ears would, undoubtedly, be on Dr Mahathir's address as it will be his last before he steps down as Umno president in October.

"I personally believe we are not going to lose him because being a statesman known the world over, I believe he will still contribute his ideas to Umno and Malaysia and the world.

"With his credibility, goodwill and stature, he will be our gift to the world. I am sure the world's citizens still want to hear from him," Musa said.