

Taib hints Effendi as successor
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Sarawak Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud last night dropped the clearest hint so far that Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Effendi Norwawi could be his successor as party leader and chief minister.

To a viewer's question in a live talk show on TV1 on whether Effendi, 59, would go back and take over eventually as chief minister, Taib said Effendi's services were presently required by Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at the federal level.

He added that when his (Effendi's) services were no longer required by Pak Lah, then he would talk to him about coming back to serve in Sarawak.

To another question from a Sarawak viewer on when he (Taib) would step down as CM, Taib said he had actually planned to step down last year.

But owing to certain unforeseen circumstances, he decided to carry on and was now in the process of grooming younger leaders to take over from him.

He said former Natural Resources and Environment Minister Adenan Satem had chosen not to seek re-election in order to give younger leaders a chance to go up.

Taib said he is now building up a united, cohesive and young and dynamic team within his party in order to take over from the present crop of leaders when the time comes.

No time-frame given

The CM appeared surprised that three questions from viewers were posed about his retirement plans.

Officials said he had anticipated such questions, however, and his answers seemed to indicate that he was not willing to give a time-frame within which he would quit as party leader and chief minister.

Taib has held the reigns of leadership in the state since 1981 when he took over from his uncle Tun Rahman Yakub who went on to serve for a term as Sarawak Governor. Uncle and nephew had a falling-out eventually with Rahman trying to oust Taib from power but failed in 1987.

At the recent PBB Convention in Miri, Taib said his successor would be chosen by the party's caucus of elected representatives and not by the party's highest decision-making body, the supreme council.