

## **Revolt may threaten Pakatan's Sabah hopes**

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**by Aidila Razak**

GE WATCH Pakatan Rakyat's election campaign in up to seven parliamentary seats on the west coast of Sabah may come to nothing if the local candidates favoured by PKR in the state are sidelined.

Party workers may hang up their tools if those they nominated as candidates are not chosen by the central leadership, local PKR leaders warned.

This, they said, would be especially so if the candidates picked for the May 5 general election are from Pakatan's new allies, Angkatan Perubahan Sabah (APS) and Pertubuhan Pakatan Perubahan Sabah (PPPS) - both formed by politicians who quit BN recently.

"My telephone inbox is full of messages from party workers saying they won't work if their chosen candidates are not selected. I can tell you that the party election machinery will 'jam up'.

"So, if newcomers are chosen, they have to get their own campaign machinery. The machinery that we have today was built over many years.

"How am I supposed to tell them now to work for a party that betrays their trust? I have run out of answers to all the party workers' questions," one Sabah PKR division chief told Malaysiakini on condition of anonymity.

Sparking speculation of such a mutiny last week, Tuaran PKR chief Ansari Abdullah (far right) pre-empted the PKR central leadership by announcing the names of candidates for seven parliamentary seats on the Sabah west coast region.

They are Ansari himself for Tuaran, Dr Chong Eng Leong (Sepanggar), Mazhry Nasir (Putatan), Anthony Mandiau (Kota Marudu), Mursalim Tanjul (Kudat), Saidil Simoi (Kota Belud) and Jonathan Yassin (Ranau).

'Spitting on their own faces'

According to Monash University political scientist James Chin, Sabah politics is "not split along coastal lines", with Pakatan standing an equal chance in west coast Kota Kinabalu and east coast Sandakan.

However, Chin said, voter sentiments in Sabah depended on ethnicity as well as the rural-urban divide.

The proximity of the seven constituencies in question to Kota Kinabalu may see some of the urban ripple effect, especially if the question of local autonomy is raised.

According to another Sabah PKR division leader, sidelining leaders nominated by the grassroots would render void the pledge made by the top leadership to allow the divisions in the state to name their own candidates for the election.

"So, if newcomers are selected instead, then the pledge is rendered cosmetic and the sincerity of the leadership in honouring Sabah autonomy becomes questionable.

"The local leaders will themselves lose credibility. It will be like they were spitting on their own faces," he said.

Going by this measure, Chin (left) said, it appears that mutiny is already in the works.

"Sabah political parties, including Sabah Umno and Sabah PKR, believe that they should not be subjected to the same rules as in the other states, in keeping with the autonomy agreement.

"They believe the state parties should determine their own candidates without federal imposition," Chin said.

'People vote for party, not individual'

However, PKR Sabah chief Thamrin Jaini played down the issue, insisting that the selection process in Sabah need not be any different from elsewhere.

"The divisions give their lists to the state leadership, and we pass these on to the central leadership for endorsement," Thamrin said when contacted.

"But we uphold democracy, so it is not a problem for (Ansari) to make his announcement. These names were already in the list passed on to the central leadership. Once the leadership makes its decision, we will abide by it."

Thamrin (left) added that when push comes to shove, voters seeking a change of government would look at the party, not at individual candidates.

However, those on the ground believe that putting a new face, especially from a different party, would force them to do double work.

"First, we have to go around introducing this new person. Then, we have to explain why it is that the local leader who everyone knows is not contesting," one division leader said.

Some of the seven named by Ansari have in 2008 contested the seats they are eyeing with commendable results, despite the resources available then.

For example, in Kota Belud, located less than an hour away from Kota Kinabalu, PKR's Saidil commanded 14,822 votes, trailing BN's Abdul Rahman Dahlan by only seven percent of the

votes.

Ansari was defeated in Tuaran by then BN candidate Wilfred Bumburing, with a much larger majority of 6,622, or 16 percent of the votes cast.

Ansari likely knocked off

The PKR Tuaran chief himself is likely to be knocked off the candidate list as Bumburing has left the BN to form Pakatan-friendly APS.

Both Wilfred (left) and Beaufort incumbent and PPPS chief Lajim Ukin were promised seats when they quit the BN last year.

Pakatan has also tried to accommodate their respective NGOs in seat negotiations, which in the end peeved off another local party SAPP, a situation that will very likely see multi-cornered fights in most seats in Sabah.

Another seat with overlapping claims is Sepanggar, with the PAS machinery already ready to go for it.

"Before APS and PPPS came into the picture, Sepanggar was supposed to be a PAS seat. Now we don't know," a PAS source said.

Majority Muslim Sepanggar was won with a staggering majority of 11,461 votes by SAPP's Eric Majimbun.

With PKR vice-president Tian Chua barred from Sabah as a result of statement he allegedly made on the Lahad Datu incursion, PKR de facto Anwar Ibrahim himself is in Kota Kinabalu today to sort out last-minute issues.

"We are supposed to announce our candidates today, but it's not confirmed. We have not finalised the candidates yet," Thamrin said when contacted yesterday.

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