

Umno set to muscle into Sarawak
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COMMENT That Umno badly needs to enter Sarawak, just as it did Sabah much earlier, is clear these days in Putrajaya and East Malaysia. The debate now in the corridors of power is 'when'.

Umno's presence in Sabah compensated for the ruling party's electoral losses in Peninsular in 2008, and saved it from further mauling by the Opposition.

Now, it's Sarawak's turn to rescue Umno.

By-election nomination day 080510 mahmud taib 02Political pundits reckon that the Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) can be arm-twisted to make way for Umno. After all, Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission's (MACC) and the Special Branch's files on PBB chief and Sarawak Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud (right) must have reached ceiling-high over the years, according to his critics.

With Taib "now highly vulnerable," it is said that PBB branches may have to re-emerge as Umno branches.

It's a simple script followed in Sabah, where the United Sabah National Organisation (Usno) had to make way for Umno. Many of its leaders had second thoughts and openly resisted, resulting in the instant de-registration of Usno on the dubious grounds of "national security".

Usno chief Mustapha Harun subsequently joined the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) to express his displeasure with Umno, and then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in particular. Mustapha was threatened with bankruptcy over his unpaid RM20 million Bank Bumiputera loan, for which he pledged his Pulau Daat - a haven for illegals - near Labuan, as security.

Ex-Usno leaders are still without a party today, and have since aligned themselves with Jeffrey Kitingan's Common Interest Group Malaysia (Cigma).

Karmic justice

The de-registration of PBB, not unthinkable in Umno circles, would be karmic justice since the party has been instrumental over the years in splintering and/or de-registering other parties in Sarawak to its advantage.

sng chee hua and james masing prs support 040206In addition, it has sufficient financial and political clout to prevent the registration of parties like the Malaysian Dayak Congress (MDC) led by former Sarawak Deputy Chief Minister Daniel Tajem Anak Miri. Tajem's Parti Bansa Dayak Congress, a PBB-financed splinter from the Sarawak National Party (Snap), was de-registered and yet another splinter - Parti Rakyat Sarawak - registered within a few days under James Jemut Masing (centre in photo).

Snap got a new lease of life from the courts recently, after it was de-registered and yet another splinter - Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party under William Mawan - took its place in the state BN.

PBB has undoubtedly accumulated more than its fair share of political bad karma over the

years. Umno will use this to its advantage until it too runs out of time.

Umno needing Sarawak, and having the opportunity or excuse to go in were previously two separate factors. Now, they are merging, re-enacting Sabah when PBS pulled out from the BN so that Umno had an excuse to enter "and save the Muslims from Christian rule".

In Sarawak, PBB will not pull out from the BN like PBS did, and sign its own death warrant in the process. But Umno will find other excuses. The official reason in the eventuality is expected to be "to save Sarawak from the Opposition," and privately, to "preserve Muslim hegemony of Sarawak as the Dayaks gets restive".

Toothless Taib

Meanwhile, Taib has not only become a toothless old bulldog in state politics but a growing liability. He's ailing, wrestling with health issues, rapidly aging and his "politics of development" is in shambles from extensive corruption in the state.

NONEDisturbing questions are being raised over the extent of his enormous private and personal wealth salted away overseas (right). The opposition has smelt blood and is eager for the kill as they sense that Taib is probably coming apart.

The Sarawak United People's Party (Supp), his strongest ally under his relative by marriage George Chan, is rapidly coming apart as well, under the ferocious assault of the Sarawak DAP and amidst internal bickering.

The old guards and young Turks are at each other's throats but it will be a pyrrhic victory. The Chinese electorate in general appears to have written off the party and openly says so. Supp lost eight of its 19 state seats to DAP in 2006. It also lost the Sibuluan parliamentary seat to DAP in a by-election on May 16.

Taib, "cowering in sheer terror these days at his palatial Demak Jaya" according to insider accounts, is pleading with Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to hold the general election at the same time as the state election, which must come before the middle of next year. A simultaneous election, Taib reckons, will better protect him from the Opposition.

NONENajib (centre in photo) has to decide between the lesser of two evils, a general election between now and early next year, or go for a full term and watch Taib squirm. Either way, he reckons that Sarawak is ripe for Umno, at the very latest either before or after the next general election. It could come as early as after the next state election, and if a joint election is held, then Umno can only enter Sarawak afterwards.

The bet is on Taib wanting state elections by the first quarter of next year at the very latest. This, he reckons, gives him sufficient time to help Supp put its house in order and take other damage control measures.

This includes soothing public fears over his reported plans to install a dynastic line of succession.

Election by numbers

However, elections may come as early as this September. Taib himself hinted at a BN retreat in Mulu on June 23, apparently after consulting his numerologists, that the next state elections will take place on a Saturday either on a 9th, 18th, or 27th, and possibly in

the 9th month. Taib has a fascination - un-Islamic - with the number 'nine' just as Malaysian Indian Congress Party President S Samy Vellu is fascinated with the number 'eight'.

But it was on his birthday Sat 8, March 2008, that Samy lost his Sungei Siput parliamentary seat. Taib could suffer the same fate.

George Chan and Taib's fengshui experts beg to differ with the numerologists, and reckon that 10/10/10 – October 10, 2010 – which falls on a Sunday, is the most auspicious day to hold the state elections.

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