

To leave BN or not, that's the question for SUPP
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A possible mutiny on the BN ship has been the talk of the town in Sarawak over the past week, as the rumour mill adds fuel to speculation that the state election is indeed near.

Local newspaper The Borneo Post quoted SUPP secretary-general Sim Kheng Hui (left) as saying that the state coalition's second-largest party faces a tough ultimatum from its grassroots - leave BN or face the wrath of the people.

Online portal FreeMalaysiaToday reinforced this notion, quoting "grassroots leaders" who blamed Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud's authoritarian rule for SUPP's waning influence, particularly among the Chinese.

Their discontent was clearly framed by SUPP's loss of eight seats to the opposition in 2006 and most recently the Sibü by-election, won by DAP, last May.

But is that truly the motivation behind the alleged "push" for SUPP to leave the state BN, some 40 years since they decided to join it in 1970?

Rumours aren't new

There have long been rumours of discontent among the ranks in the way SUPP's political fortunes have dwindled over the years, mostly over their perceived inability to deliver to their largely Chinese support base.

bn supreme council mt meeting sapp sabah issue 190608 taib mahmudThat apparent inability is blamed squarely on Taib (right), who is seen as the architect behind SUPP's emasculation in the eyes of Sarawak's Chinese voters by keeping the lion's share of resources to himself and his party, PBB.

And talk of SUPP's top leaders apparently signing a letter of undertaking last week - to stick with the party, sink or swim - does little to stem the rumours.

SUPP's Sibü information chief Daniel Ngieng noted that the party has decided to leave it to president George Chan or secretary-general Sim to make whatever announcements necessary, citing a gag order on party affairs.

Ngieng however brushed aside speculations over SUPP's possible exit from the state BN as a normal phenomenon before impending elections.

"(Pulling out) is only one of many courses of action, but the leadership has never talked about it. There may have been some frustration, but the issue (of quitting BN) at this moment does not arise," he said when contacted.

NONEWhen asked about a purported high-profile meeting held between top SUPP leaders in Kuala Lumpur last week, Ngieng (left) said there was no official meeting scheduled, though he added that it was probably an impromptu meeting "over tea".

It was reported that the party's top-brass had met to discuss SUPP's future involvement with the state BN and to get each leader to sign the letter of undertaking to stick with the party, regardless of the outcome of the leadership's decisions.

"The rumours surrounding this (meeting) may have been spread by some people who merely want to speculate over another Ming Court incident," he said, referring to a plot to topple Taib in the late 1980s.

Too much at stake

A long-time party observer agreed that there is too much fluff and not enough meat to back claims of a potential revolt by SUPP.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the observer, who has followed the party's developments over the past 15 years, pointed out that many of the senior leaders would be giving up top government posts if they were to engineer a rebellion.

supp and sarawak state election "You are looking at the bulk of them holding senior ministerial posts in the state government... do you think they are going to give that up?," the observer pointed out.

Pulling the spotlight onto the grassroots, the observer said the agents behind SUPP's rumoured push to quit the BN would more likely be a silent faction that has enough sway among party members to rock the boat hard.

But until either the party leadership or the alleged faction come out in the open, armed with their intentions, it looks like pundits will have to be content with the near-daily speculation and conspiracies over SUPP's continued partnership with the BN.

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