

Sabah Chinese DCM quota: Open game - again
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It looks like the Chinese quota in Sabah's three deputy Chief Minister posts is again up for grabs, with the recent resignation of Peter Pang En Yin from the LDP in the midst of the escalating war of words between Chief Minister Musa Aman and the LDP's party leadership.

By convention, a partyless politician, even if he or she openly declares support for the ruling state government, will be hard-pressed to hold on to the senior portfolio - as clearly illustrated by Raymond Tan Shu Kiah.

Tan was without a party for a good nine months after he quit as SAPP deputy president when it pulled out of the BN coalition in 2008 as a show of no confidence in the federal leadership.

Even after he decided to join Gerakan while still holding on to his government post, he was eventually replaced by Pang in favour of having a local party representing the interests of Sabah's Chinese community.

NONETHis decision has ironically put Pang (left in photo) - and the rest of the state BN - in a bind following Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's announcement that the former LDP vice-president will now be joining Gerakan.

Being left high and dry

If Musa (right in photo) and the state BN decide to uphold their earlier decision, Pang would be left high and dry and it is likely that the former would not want to anger the numerous members of his coalition by handing out a free ticket to the Gerakan to fill the vacancy.

But with the continuing animosity between Musa and the LDP being the reason that the problem cropped up in the first place, very few options are left to fill the void.

While the PBS fits the bill of being a local and multi-racial party, they have already taken one of the deputy Chief Minister seats by virtue of party president Joseph Pairin Kitingan filling up the non-Muslim bumiputera quota.

And it would be quite a stretch for Umno to take up the vacant position, what with the party already holding both the Chief Ministership and one deputy Chief Minister's post, filled by Petagas assemblyperson Yahya Hussin for the Muslim bumiputera quota.

This leaves little reason to hand it over to either Upko or PBRs, as both parties represent the majority Kadazandusun and Murut population - a quota already taken up by PBS.

The last option remaining is the MCA, whose Chinese-centric politics makes it the obvious choice to fill the Chinese quota should Pang be removed.

A catch-22 situation in the offing?

The concern here, however, is how far the national party holds sway among Sabah's Chinese community, considering that they only have one state seat, that of state MCA chief and Kepyayan assemblyperson Edward Khoo.

Talk on the ground also indicates that Khoo may not be as popular as he would like to be in the community, with some observers going so far as to claim that appointing him to the post may not reflect the wishes of the state's Chinese population.

But in true Sabah political tradition, the situation will remain in a state of flux until and unless a final decision is made and announced by the Chief Minister.

With all the covert - and possibly outright - lobbying expected in the coming days, nobody can claim to have a clear shot at the coveted post.

And if the state BN leadership decides to spring a surprise selection, all concerned should remember that stranger things have happened in Sabah's political arena.

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