

Jeffrey declines nomination for PKR VP
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Sabah strongman Jeffrey Kitingan told a hushed press conference hastily convened in Kota Kinabalu this afternoon that he wasn't going for any national post at the upcoming PKR elections.

Even the local media, judging by their reaction, do not appear to have anticipated the proverbial bolt from the blue.

"I would like to thank all those who nominated me for the post of national vice president," said Jeffrey (*right*).

"However, I would like to confirm that I won't be accepting the nominations. I am staying out of the race for any national party post."

He was flanked at the press conference by several senior PKR Sabah leaders led by staunch supporter deputy state chief Christina Liew who was close to tears at the announcement, which, in her words, took her aback.

The outgoing national vice president stressed that his struggle had "never been about party posts or positions". It had always been and would continue to be about Sabah and Sarawak rights and autonomy, he added.

"This is a struggle that cuts across the political divide in Sabah and Sarawak and it could do without any distractions."

He decision appears to signal a subtle shift in his current position from being party politician to that of a statesman for Sabah and Sarawak "while re-capturing the moral high ground on what his politics is all about".

Kitingan reiterated that the contest for party posts and positions every three years and in-between was an unnecessary pre-occupation that was draining resources, taxing energies and "a major distraction from the real issues, principles and priorities that concern the people in Sabah and Sarawak".

These were the areas, he said, that would translate into votes for any party "and not just winning a post or position in a way that damages the party".

Besides, he said that he had already been national vice-president and sees "no point in hogging at his age a relatively junior and powerless post and continue to be bogged down by a situation where "no one listens to you".

Party soul searching needed

He said that he had even given up the national vice-president's post late last year when he made his "burnt my bridges" statement and went on a sabbatical for three months. At that time, Kitingan's major grouse was that the PKR headquarters "did not respect the democratic voice of the majority in Sabah".

"I have seen what one can do as a national vice-president which is very little," he said. "No

one listens to anyone in the supreme council and being a vice-president makes no difference."

Asked whether this meant that the political interests of Sabah and Sarawak don't coincide with that of Peninsular Malaysia, he conceded that there were "major differences but nothing that cannot be resolved".

"Of course, they (Peninsular Malaysia) have their politics and we have ours," said Kitingan. "But we can still work together as genuine partners on the agenda for change and reform. Malaysia is still one country."

On a question about the election process underway in PKR, he indicated that "it would be kinder not to comment".

He also added that he understood, and even accepted that no system was without faults but the question was whether one was willing to accept them and even look the other way. He declined to elaborate but ventured that "we (PKR) need to do some serious soul-searching here and everyone should examine his or her conscience on the subject".

He pledged his support for Lembah Pantai MP Nurul Izzah Anwar (*right*) "should she decide to contest the post of deputy president and Pakatan Rakyat co-ordinator Zaid Ibrahim stays out". Nurul is the daughter of Opposition Leader and de facto PKR chief Anwar Ibrahim.

Kitingan's also backed Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, Anwar's wife, to continue as party president.

"Having a mother-daughter team to head a political party is a unique situation but in this particular case, it can be viewed as something positive for the party," said Jeffrey. "It's a one-off phenomenon, perhaps never again to be repeated for a very long time."

Touching on Nurul in particular, he said that PKR was a relatively new party with not many seniors and that the young should be brought into the party hierarchy to attract the four million new voters of their generation.

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