

Sabah PKR tussle over process to select new chief  
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Sabah Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) had an inconclusive meet of division chiefs before noon yesterday on the election of the new state party chief and other matters.

pkr congress pc 271110 saifuddin nasutionNo official statement was issued to the media after the three-hour meet chaired by PKR secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution Ismail (left).

Outgoing state chief and Libaran division chief Ahmad Thamrin Jaini skipped away shortly after the meet ended and could not be contacted. Pensiangan and Kota Kinabalu were absent while Penampang and Kudat sent representatives.

Thamrin's supporters, according to insider accounts, wanted the new state chief to be elected by secret ballot.

This was opposed by a couple of division chiefs who wanted the matter to be settled by either a show of hands or consensus.

"One division chief demanded to know why the ballot should be secret," said a division chief who requested anonymity. "Apparently, he was afraid that those who had pledged support for Thamrin would carry the day if the ballot was secret."

Finally, a consensus of the divisions chiefs agreed to let party president Wan Azizah Wan Ismail to decide on the matter under the party constitution.

"We are back to square one as the last time when Thamrin was appointed after Jeffrey Kitangan's appointment was opposed by Anwar," said another division chief. "Let's hope that the party president would appoint a state chief who can command the support and respect of the majority of division chiefs. Otherwise, it will be a debacle."

NONESome division chiefs headed for the meet wanted either Pensiangan division chief Jeffrey (right) or Papar division chief James Ghani to be the state chief by consensus.

This reportedly led to other division chiefs pointing out, just before the meet began, that Jeffrey had publicly stated that he was not interested in being the new state chief or nominated vice president from Sabah/Sarawak.

This was also in response to senior party activist Kalakau Untol briefing a Fellowship Dinner at his residence in Tuaran recently that de facto party chief "Anwar Ibrahim wants to re-appoint Jeffrey as vice-president from Sabah/Sarawak" besides being the de facto chief for the two states.

Kalakau, a former Federal Deputy Minister, had then returned from Kuala Lumpur after a meet with Anwar on several proposals from the Sabah chapter.

Support expressed

Jeffrey, who declined 40 nominations for a vice-presidency, has already expressed support for the next candidate for the post to come from Sarawak which faces an imminent state

election. The Sabah strongman had previously held the post of vice-president besides being de facto Sabah/Sarawak chief.

The pro-Jeffrey and pro-Ghani division chiefs both felt that the appointment of a "contentious" candidate as state chief would merely result in a repeat of history. No names were mentioned regarding the contentious candidates.

Also, the general feeling was that those who had previously served as state chiefs should consider themselves out of the running for the post to give an opportunity to others".

NONEIt's an open secret that Thamrin (left) would like to be state chief again despite a lacklustre performance in office and a fall-out with Anwar over the recent Batu Sapi parliamentary by-election.

The meeting was also divided on the issue of Anwar sending word through Kalakau that he was agreeable to the selection of candidates from Sabah for the next general election to be decided by four divisions chiefs viz. Jeffrey Kitingan for the KadazanDusunMurut candidates including the Muslims from the community, Thamrin for the other Muslim candidates and Kota Kinabalu and Tawau division chiefs, Christina Liew and Kong Hong Ming respectively, on the Chinese candidates.

Liew is also a member of the Supreme Council along with Dr Roland Chia from Penampang.

Apparently, Anwar wants to avoid the recent spectacle in Batu Sapi when he rode roughshod over the selection of the candidate by a six-man committee headed by Jeffrey. The committee had short-listed Liew and Kong for a final selection.

Anwar however went along with a rebel group which had short-listed three Muslim candidates for the parliamentary seat. Thamrin, one of the three short-listed by the rebel group, was furious with Anwar when he was not considered.

Batu Sapi division chief Hassnar Ebrahim, another short-listed candidate, was reportedly considered "too controversial" by Anwar and tainted by his detention under the Internal Security Act (ISA) over the issuance of MyKads to illegal immigrants and their placement on the electoral rolls.

Acrimonious note

The meet apparently ended on an acrimonious note when a division chief proposed that "those division chiefs who stayed away from the campaigning in Batu Sapi be hauled up by the party for disciplinary action". The majority took a dim view of anything that would open up old wounds.

It is said that 15 division chiefs, led by Jeffrey and Liew, stayed away from Batu Sapi after the division reportedly announced that they were "not welcome" in the parliamentary seat. It is believed that the existence of 5,000 illegal immigrants on the electoral rolls in the Sekong state seat may have had something to do with the ban on the leaders.

Kudat division chief Mursalim Tanjul was even roughed up at Sandakan Airport minutes after Anwar left for Kuala Lumpur after announcing the PKR candidate for the seat.

He has since announced his resignation from the party but the two matters were not brought up at the meet. Mursalim's unfortunate experience in Sandakan apparently resulted

in the other 14 division chiefs staying out of the fray.

On the sidelines of the meet, some division chiefs said that the party should ask PKR Batu Sapi for an explanation on Mursalim, the reported list of 15 names and the controversial party elections in the division.

Observers say that Sabah PKR members have splintered in the wake of the recent elections with the Muslims in three camps i.e. Dusun including Bisaya and Orang Sungei; Bajau/Suluk; and other Muslims; and the Chinese in two camps.

Jeffrey, when asked why he did not attend the state party meeting, said that he was not invited. "In any case, I am on two months leave from the party until Dec 16," said Jeffrey who recently hinted that he may extend his leave given the festive cheer among others. "I have already said what I wanted to say on the vice-presidency and the state chief. If Thamrin wants to be state chief again, it's okay with me but I think that he should give others a chance."

He said that he was not privy to what had transpired at the state meet. Besides, he has been busy with family and personal matters after he recently moved to a new residence in Likas.

His sprawling Sokid Villa residence up Bukit Padang, the setting for many Sabah PKR meetings, has been taken over by the Sayfol International School, the second international school in Kota Kinabalu.

Sayfol, run in association with the University of London, opens its doors to students next month. Jeffrey added that he has no interest in Sayfol which will occupy the premises for five years with an option for a second five years.

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