

KK abuzz with talks of possible defections
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Kota Kinabalu is abuzz with speculations that the first batch of Sabah parliamentarians are likely to cross over to Pakatan Rakyat 'sooner than expected', possibly in the coming weeks. MCPX

When contacted today in Kota Kinabalu to comment on the rumours, state PKR chief Ansari Abdullah told Malaysiakini, "I am not privy to the timing but I am certainly privy to the fact that some are contemplating such a move."

"Just wait," was the response from his colleague and party's deputy chief Dr Jeffrey Kitingan, who lost by a small margin to his brother PBS leader and Deputy Chief Minister Joseph Pairin in the Keningau parliamentary seat.

Speculations of possible defections are rife after Sabah Chief Minister Musa Aman's brother Anifah Aman, the Kimanis MP who turned down a deputy minister post from Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, said in Parliament last week that there was nothing wrong in switching sides if there "was no more room" in the present ruling coalition.

Anifa had harboured hope that he would be promoted to a full minister after having served as deputy minister in the previous government.

Joseph Pairin Kitingan 010706 Meanwhile, Pairin (left), a former chief minister and head of a Kadazandusun-based party that once ruled Sabah in the 1980s, dished out more fodder for the rumour mill two days ago.

He was quoted as saying that it would be the "natural feelings" of Sabahans to switch parties if demands from state could not be met by the federal government.

Pairin was apparently referring not only to the reported dissatisfaction of BN component parties when the prime minister failed to appoint more Sabah MPs in the federal cabinet but also the federal government's inability to take action on many of the long-standing grievances of Sabahans.

Among them are the allegations that identity cards were issued to many illegal immigrants and the problems these migrant communities have brought to the state where they now outnumber local Sabahans.

Ansari told Malaysiakini that the only plausible reason why BN MPs want to cross over was their unhappiness over a litany of issues affecting Sabah.

To a question, he said the BN MPs contemplating the move are not only from Umno Sabah but also a number of other component parties.

Ansari declined to name the parties, saying this was out of respect for those who were mulling the move, but the people would know in due course.

Malaysiakini, however, learnt that among the MPs likely to cross over to Pakatan are those from PBS and SAPP - both member of the ruling BN coalition - in addition to a number from

Umno.

Less talk of crossover in Sarawak

A Kota Kinabalu-based senior journalist told Malaysiakini that one compelling reason for the BN MPs to seriously considering joining Pakatan is that they would stand a good chance of being offered full ministerial positions in the new government and to be able to do more to resolve some of the serious problems affecting Sabah.

“The possibility of that happening is very great, especially if it is felt by these people that the Abdullah-led government could fall due to internal party problems within Umno and problems among BN coalition partners and the increasing dislike for BN policies which have been rejected by many voters,” he added.

2008 election results for sabah and sarawak 120508“Sabahans are fed up. They want meaningful change and that change can only come about with a change of regime with the opportunities now offered by Pakatan comprising PKR, DAP, PAS and the home-grown political parties in Sabah as well as Sarawak.”

According to observers, talk about some Sabah MPs crossing over in the coming weeks has not come as a surprise as their defection could induce more to follow suit before Sept 16 - the date PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim has indicated as 'D-Day' for Pakatan to take over the federal government.

Anwar at a press conference has reiterated that the federal government would fall by September.

However, there is less talk of a crossover in Sarawak. Nevertheless, many leaders in the state BN component parties have said Pakatan's threat to take over federal government should no longer be taken lightly.

Sarawak and Sabah have a total of 56 MPs and the BN controls 54, with the two remaining parliamentary seats in the hands of DAP (Bandar Kuching in Sarawak and Kota Kinabalu in Sabah).

Without Sabah and Sarawak, the federal government will not have a simple majority to form the federal government.

But even with the defection of all Sabah MPs, Pakatan would still fall short in forming government - it needs at least 30 and perhaps another five to 10 more should it wants to form a stable regime.

However, a switch by a sizable number of parliamentarians could further destabilised Umno.