

Shift in Sabah political alliance this month?

Malaysiakini.com

Jun 16, 2008

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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's RM1 billion 'bag of goodies' for Sabah late last month has failed to quash talks of possible defection from the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition.

MCPX

An undisclosed number of Sabah's elected representatives from one or more BN component parties are expected to announce in the next two weeks that they are quitting the ruling coalition.

It is expected that they will remain Independents initially, with the option of joining the opposition Pakatan Rakyat coalition at a later date.

State capital Kota Kinabalu is again abuzz with rumours after former Umno vice-president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah - who is mounting a challenge against Abdullah for party president - said during the weekend that one party could be pulling out of the BN any time.

Razaleigh, a former finance minister who is gunning for Umno's No 1 post in December if he can secure enough nominations, was in Sabah recently and had met with several Umno leaders to garner support for his campaign.

tengku razaleigh forum 260408 ku li speaking While Razaleigh did not name the party, he was widely believed to be referring to Sabah People's Progressive Party (Sapp), led by outspoken former chief minister Yong Teck Lee.

Sapp has two members of parliament and four state assemblypersons in Sabah.

yong teck lee According to reports circulating in Kota Kinabalu, which have not been denied, Yong (right) and his six elected representatives have informed the BN leadership they are quitting the coalition.

A close associate of Yong said that Sapp will however not join Pakatan Rakyat after quitting BN.

"The whole idea of the move is to build up the momentum and several more elected representatives from Upko, PBRS, PBS and even Umno in Sabah are expected to follow suit," sources told Malaysiakini.

sapp mps and state assembly reps sabah 160608 Over the weekend, Sapp organised a forum 'Economy in Jeopardy' in Kota Kinabalu which was attended by party leaders and members. Sources said strong statements were made and members made it quite clear how they felt about the party's direction.

Meanwhile, state PKR liaison committee chief Ansari Abdullah has again told Malaysiakini "to expect something big to happen in the week".

Like his deputy, Dr Jeffrey Kitingan, who is also national PKR vice-president, he declined to go into any details.

"June 18 is an auspicious date for the Chinese," was all Kitingan would say.

PM didn't get the message

But it is not certain how the political situation is expected to unfold.

As many as 18 Sabah MPs could quit BN, according to a senior correspondent of a national English daily who is based in Kota Kinabalu.

One proposal which has been mooted is for Razaleigh to be interim prime minister in a new grand coalition that would include parties in Pakatan Rakyat and a number of ex-BN parties.

Helping to spur the defection is mounting dissatisfaction within Sabah BN component parties with the leadership of Chief Minister Musa Aman.

2008 election results for sabah 160608 "They are also greatly disappointed that Abdullah did not get the message when so many Sabah MPs have spoken in and outside Parliament about the state's problems," said sources, adding that the PM should know the situation would not improve so long as there is no leadership change in Sabah.

"A consensus is building up fast that given the current mess and uncertainty in the Umno-led BN government, a change of leadership is vital to restore confidence and stability in the country," said a source.

BN has 140 seats in the 222-seat Parliament while Pakatan has 82 seats. The opposition will need at least 30 MPs to leave BN before it can try to form a new government.

Should BN lose its parliamentary majority, the PM could dissolve Parliament and seek a new mandate through fresh elections or a new national coalition comprising the most unlikely of political parties could be invited by the King to test its support in the House.

However, Abdullah would be hard pressed to call a snap election as anger is still boiling over the recent sharp hike in fuel prices.

Anwar has repeatedly said he has garnered enough MPs for a change in government and that it will come by Sept 16 - the date Sabah and Sarawak regard as their day of independence when both states join Malaya to form Malaysia.