

Point of no return for Sapp
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The Sabah Progressive Party's (Sapp) press conference, which kicked off just after 2pm at the party headquarters in Bornion Centre in Kota Kinabalu, was packed with both local and foreign journalists.

MCPX

The excitement was palpable as hours before the event, there was much speculation as to what the 'important announcement' was going to be.

sapp sabah pc 180608 01At the 90-minute press conference, Sapp chief Yong Teck Lee was seen flanked by Tawau member of parliament and party vice-president, Dr Chua Soon Bui, and other top members of the party supreme council.

Sapp has one other MP, Eric Enchin Majimbun (Sepanggar) - he was not at today's event as he was overseas on "official business".

Also absent were the party's four state assemblypersons, which included Sabah deputy chief minister and deputy president Raymond Tan and assistant minister Melanie Chia.

According to a party official, their absence was to send the message that the press conference was called solely on the issue of the party's lack of confidence in Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's leadership. Apparently, at the state level, Sapp will continue to be part of the Sabah government.

The press conference began with Chua reading her statement and this was followed by Majimbun's press statement - which was read by a party leader - and finally the statement made by Yong himself.

Expect next move on Friday

The party's supreme council will meet on Friday but it is not known what will be on the agenda, other than to discuss the parliamentary sitting on Monday where a notice is to be given for a motion of no confidence to be tabled against Abdullah.

"Today's announcement is the first step (to force Abdullah to resign as prime minister)," said a party source.

sapp sabah pc 180608 03Over the next few days, party leaders will decide their next course of action which could possibly include whether Sapp would pull out of BN.

"With today's announcement, Sapp has reached a point of no return," said a political observer.

"If it failed with its objective (to move the no-confidence motion), it has only one course of action open to it - leave BN and join the opposition Pakatan Rakyat or form a new independent alliance made up of BN-elected representatives unhappy with the present leadership."

Yong has argued that Sapp is fighting for interests of Sabahans and for the state's many grievances to be properly addressed by Kuala Lumpur.

The demands for a powerful royal commission to investigate the illegal immigrants issue - sometimes dubbed as Project IC - for the state's oil and gas royalties to be raised from 5 percent to 20 percent and the return of Labuan island to Sabah may be too difficult for the federal government to meet.

"Sabahans are beginning to be more assertive of their rights, and this has put the federal authorities in a quandary on how the federal system ought to function," said an opposition leader.

History repeats itself?

sapp yong teck lee Interestingly, Yong was among several former Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) leaders who were instrumental in the decision to pull the party out of BN on the eve of the 1990 elections.

That idea was first mooted by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), then led by Dr Jeffrey Kitingan, the maverick politician brother of PBS president Joseph Pairin, along with Upko president Bernard Dompok.

Is Yong working with his former colleagues to try to repeat the feat which resulted in then prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad suffering an electoral setback.

"Yong can see very clearly how Sapp has lost much of its influence for playing by the rules where he himself was not given a seat to contest in the last elections," said the political observer.

"He is still young and has a lot of energy and stamina. But he doesn't like what is happening to his party and to BN, especially if opposition parties were to make further inroads into Sabah politics in the next elections."

No show - Yong, Anifah, Ghafur

Earlier this week, a procession of top Umno leaders have flown to Kota Kinabalu to try to head off the crisis.

Umno Youth deputy chief and Abdullah's son-in-law Khairy Jamaluddin was there a few days ago to persuade Sabah leaders to throw their support behind the prime minister.

2008 election results for sabah 160608 Abdullah himself was in Kota Kinabalu yesterday to meet top local leaders and also to close an international business conference before flying back to Kuala Lumpur at midnight.

BN sources told Malaysiakini that after getting wind of what was about to happen, Abdullah had sought unsuccessfully to meet Yong.

Yong cannot be contacted all of yesterday, with some reports saying he had gone to Singapore.

"He was in town," revealed a senior journalist. "But he was not prepared to meet Abdullah."

Apart from Yong, also absent from BN meeting yesterday were Musa Aman's outspoken brother, Kimanis MP Anifah Aman, who turned down Abdullah's offer of a deputy minister post and another Umno MP, Abdul Ghafur Salleh, who was reportedly away performing his 'umrah' (minor haj).

Anifah, Ghafur and Kinabatangan MP Bung Moktar Radin are the 'Sabah Umno trio' who have slammed the federal government over its failure to deal with a number of key grouses from the state.

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