

Pak Lah sapped out
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After many weeks of intense speculation, the first salvo has been fired in perhaps what will be a series of events that eventually leads to the demise of the Barisan Nasional government.

MCPX

Sapp's announcement yesterday that it had lost confidence in Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's leadership and would support a no-confidence motion in Parliament against him, further weakens his position as prime minister. But there is still some way to go before Pakatan Rakyat can form the next government.

sapp sabah pc 180608 02Supporting a no-confidence motion in Abdullah is not the same as crossing over to join Pakatan. Indeed, Sapp President Yong Teck Lee made it clear that his preferred option was to maintain autonomy as a Sabah-based party. While it is almost certain that his party will be expelled from the BN over this latest development, this has not occurred yet.

It's entirely possible that Yong might be somewhat of a lone ranger in his capacity as the disgruntled head of Sapp. He wanted to contest the Kota Kinabalu parliamentary seat but that seat was given to PBS instead. According to online media reports, he wanted to be made senator and given a cabinet position but that was rejected as well. At the time of writing, it's not totally clear whether he has the full support of his party in this move.

Only one of the two MPs from Sapp was present at the press conference. While the other MP, Eric Majimbun, did sign the press statement, one wonders why Yong did not wait until he returned from his overseas travel before holding this press conference.

None of the four Sapp state assemblymen was present at the press conference. While this can be explained away by the fact that Sapp has lost confidence only in Abdullah's leadership at the federal level but are still confident of BN's leadership at the state level, the four state assembly reps must know that they too would also be expelled from the state government if their party is kicked out of BN. Maybe this is their way of showing that Yong is acting alone.

More defections needed before dominoes fall

Be that as it may, it's also possible that Yong may in time be joined by other lone rangers who are also disgruntled with Abdullah's leadership, most notably Anifah Aman (Kimanis) and Abdul Ghapur Salleh (Kalabakan). An assortment of disgruntled Sabah MPs may decide to form a political party and maintain their autonomy instead of joining Pakatan.

Whether Sapp's move will be the start of the domino effect that will lead to the downfall of the BN government is still too early to say. Sapp only has two MPs. We figure PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim needs about 15 MPs to either cross over or leave the BN publicly before the domino effect can happen.

abdullah ahmad badawi pm mahathir quits umno pc 190508 04What is certain is that

Abdullah's position as PM and as head of BN has taken yet another hit, although it should be said that thus far, the move by Sapp hurts Abdullah more than it helps Anwar (Sapp has not yet joined Pakatan although that would seem to be the logical next step).

Abdullah's reaction to this move was akin to a deer caught in the headlights of a car. He seemed totally unprepared for this possibility even though such a move had been widely speculated and talked about and even hinted at by Umno veteran Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

His expression of total surprise as conveyed to the press is yet another indication that Abdullah is so out of touch with the political realities of the day. One can't help but wonder if he continues to be delusional in regard to the notion of him staying the full term as PM.

Anwar improves odds of taking power

Anwar's credibility has been somewhat bolstered by this latest development even though Sapp has not actually crossed over to Pakatan. He continues to be the major player behind the scenes and this move by Sapp lends some credence to Anwar's self-declared and self-imposed Sept 16 deadline.

rustam sani book launch 260408 anwar pcWe still think that the odds of him successfully taking over the government are still against Anwar, although they have certainly improved. If before we would peg his chances as 30 percent, right now we'd say it's closer to 40 percent. New developments in the coming days and weeks may alter his odds (for the better or the worse) considerably.

It's worth noting that Anwar's behind-the-scenes maneuvering is marked by the differing reactions from other Pakatan leaders. DAP's Lim Kit Siang did not openly endorse Sapp's move nor did he invite them to join Pakatan. Instead, he highlighted the fact that a motion of no confidence would probably not be allowed due to procedural reasons.

Other Pakatan leaders, while encouraged by this move, were more uncertain about its implications. Clearly, many of them are still are not clued into what Anwar's master plan for Pakatan is. There are many reasons to believe that the crossover dealings are being handled by Anwar and Anwar alone, but with the tacit support of the other Pakatan leaders.

The next few weeks will be crucial to Anwar's aspirations to form the next government. He needs more MPs to follow Sapp's lead in order to create the domino effect that will eventually topple the BN government. The odds are still stacked against him in this high-stakes political poker game but he is slowly but surely building up his chip stack.