

**Taib looks set to call the shots**  
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KUALA LUMPUR – Abdul Taib Mahmud looks set to lead the Sarawak Barisan Nasional into the next state elections, despite his hints of retiring and opposition from possible detractors.

The general feeling in the state is that the chief minister is the man for Sarawak at this moment.

Denis Waitley, a renowned American author, once said: "There are two primary choices in life; to accept conditions as they exist, or accept the responsibility for changing them."

It looks like members of Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) do not want to rock the boat and want their president, Taib, to lead as he is said to be the only one capable of upholding unity among the various party leaders and component parties in the Sarawak BN.

And that is a very strong criterion for leading the state, and a loud message was put forward at PBB's Supreme Council meeting in Kuching on Sunday. The unanimous decision certainly reflected Taib's strong standing within his party.

Party insiders said members of PBB's inner circle are concerned that both the party and Sarawak BN may be destabilised should Taib, who has been Sarawak's chief minister since 1981, relinquish his top party position before the state elections.

"Most of the people (in Sarawak BN) are concerned about Taib not being at the helm in the election. Whatever you say about him, he has strong leadership to ensure that things are in place in the battlefield and that the election machinery is united under one command.

"Should Taib decide to step down now, how will his successor keep the party together, especially in handling issues such as potential candidates and the internal power play that will affect the machinery during the campaign period?" a party insider asked.

The insider told Bernama that any premature decision on Taib's part to step down at this juncture would surely destabilise the party. And that explains why PBB deputy president Tan Sri Alfred Jabu revealed on Sunday that the 71 PBB branches in the state had drafted a pledge of allegiance to Taib to continue to lead as chief minister, Sarawak BN chairman and PBB president.

Citing Taib's leadership as crucial and a necessity to sustain Sarawak's political stability, peace, harmony and uninterrupted unity, Jabu specifically mentioned that the state still needed Taib in maintaining discipline to ensure strong co-operation among the BN component parties, guaranteeing excellent performance and high integrity in BN.

It is common knowledge among political circles that PBB members are also aligned to Jabu, deputy president II Datuk Seri Abang Johari Tun Abang Haji Openg, senior vice-president 1 Datuk Seri Awang Tengah Ali Hassan and newly-appointed special adviser and former federal natural resources and environment minister Datuk Seri Adenan Satem.

Another party insider said Taib had personally briefed the party supreme council members on Sunday on his succession plan and explained the controversy surrounding his earlier remark on his willingness to step down.

The details were not relayed to the media as they were not meant for publication except for a statement issued by PBB that its grassroots leaders continued to support Taib.

None of the supreme council members was willing to comment on the succession plan when contacted, except to say that they supported Taib to continue to lead the state and party.

The potential successors are likely to come from those in PBB's inner circle being groomed to take over the top leadership. They include Jabu, Abang Johari and Awang Tengah.

However, others also cannot be ruled out.

One example is Adenan, the state assemblyman for Tanjung Datu. He was appointed special advisor in the Chief Minister's Office responsible for public affairs on April 2 this year and is accorded full ministerial status.

The appointment of Adenan as special advisor to Taib has also sparked much debate in the political arena. Adenan was once tipped to replace Taib but fell out of favour with the chief minister in 2006 and has since been lying low.

In the past, a number of PBB leaders were said to have been picked to take over the helm, including the late Tan Sri Dr Sulaiman Daud, Datuk Seri Effendi Norwawi, Datuk Bujang Ulis and Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha. However, nothing materialised from the plans.

In 2006, Taib hinted that he would have a final bid as chief minister for the current term of the state administration which expires in June next year. But for the next state elections, it looks like Taib will still be calling the shots. — Bernama

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