

## **Embattled SUPP told to re-invent itself to stay relevant**

**Malaysianmirror.com**

**8 September 2010**

KUCHING - Having chosen to remain within the Barisan Nasional (BN), the embattled Sarawak United Peoples' Party (SUPP) must re-invent itself with new ideas and input to stay relevant, said Abang Johari Tun Openg (*left*).

The Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) deputy president said the same policy also applied to other state BN component parties, including PBB.

PBB saw over 20 per cent changes in its party candidates at every election, by injecting young people, together with experienced and able leaders, to lead the backbone of the state BN coalition, he noted.

"In this case, I feel SUPP is undergoing that process of adjustment and their leaders will have to gauge for themselves what sort of changes they must make within the party, as well as to look at their own weaknesses," said Abang Johari, who is also state housing and urban development minister.

He was speaking to reporters after presenting Hari Raya gifts to 59 Muslim families at the Hung Nam Siang T'ng Home here Wednesday.

Likewise, he said, PBB, which had a long history with SUPP, was trying very hard to adjust to the changing environment by fielding new faces, especially women candidates, with the right experience and academic qualification to be able to tackle the current problems through technology and scientific means.

Actually, SUPP has been PBB's partner since 1970 when Sarawak was the first coalition government, prior to BN's formation but the partnership must be sustained, he said.

He said SUPP should give space for the younger generation to express themselves, besides reflecting on the strength of the opposition DAP which might have appealed more to the young.

SUPP lost Sibuluan, which was once regarded its stronghold, to DAP during the recent parliamentary by-election, besides faring badly in the 2006 state election when it lost eight of the 19 seats contested, including six to DAP.

Despite rumours that SUPP wanted to leave BN, following comments by Supp grassroots members pertaining to issues faced by the Chinese community in Sarawak, Abang Johari said he enjoyed close relationship with his Supp colleagues in the state cabinet.

"There has never been a question of racial discrimination in my 30 years in politics, and even today, I go to this area (Jalan Sekama), which is practically a Chinese area and then the Chinese are giving assistance to the Malays," he said when referring to the function.

He cited the housing sector, where many Chinese companies had ventured, besides successfully injecting new technology to build houses using the industrialised building system, as an example.

On Monday, SUPP president Dr George Chan quashed rumours that the party, which has been a partner with PBB since the 1970s, would leave BN.

However some PBB stalwarts had stated that it was unwise on SUPP's part to have hinted that it wanted to leave BN, having implied that the state BN coalition was the cause of its problems. - Bernama

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