

What's Brewing In Snap?

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 22 (Bernama) -- What's brewing in Sarawak's oldest political party, the Sarawak National Party (SNAP)?

What does the future hold for this party as it prepares for its triennial general assembly scheduled for Sept 24 and 25 in Kuching.

Many political analysts have already written off any future for SNAP in Sarawak's political landscape as they believe it will never be able to rise again to its former glory.

"The party is basically finished. It's the end of the road. It has a branding issue with funding as its biggest problem. Previously, it was funded by the top leader who was financially strong. But the current leadership is facing financial constraints," political analyst James Chin told Bernama.

Himself a Sarawakian, Chin, who lectures at Sunway's Monash University, pointed out that before the April 16 Sarawak state election there was still some hope that SNAP could revive itself by winning some level of support in the polls but the result proved otherwise.

"The result has basically shown that the party is not relevant anymore," he said.

Out of the 672,667 (68.66 per cent) registered voters who cast their votes in the April 16 polls, SNAP, which contested 26 seats, garnered only 15,663 votes (2.33 per cent). The party failed to any seat while most of its candidates lost their deposits.

Another political analyst, Dr Jeniri Amir of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) said that though the party managed to reverse its deregistration by the Registrar of Societies (ROS), the deregistration had taken a significant toll on the party.

SNAP, which was formed on April 10, 1961, was deregistered by the ROS in 2002. The party won the appeal last year when the Court of Appeal set aside the ROS decision.

"The eight-year court battle was long and further weakened the party. Because of the deregistration, it lost its grassroots support. That's why the party lost badly in the state election," said Jeniri.

He feels the party has no more future in Sarawak politics as it has lost its appeal, especially among the Ibans as other Dayak-based parties were enjoying much more support.

"There is no light at the end of the tunnel. No future for SNAP in Sarawak politics. But despite all this and the changing political scenario, the party leadership is still playing old politics and employing old strategies. No way it can garner the support of the people," he said.

Not only that, some party members themselves have complained that they are clueless as to the direction of the party.

Some even questioned whether the party that was founded by Sarawak's first chief minister, the late Tan Sri Stephen Kalong Ningkan, was still relevant in today's politics.

They claimed that nobody knew whether the party wanted to remain in the opposition or become friendly to the Barisan Nasional (BN).

SNAP secretary-general Edmund Stanley Jugol admitted that the party would only know its direction for sure after the assembly this weekend -- whether to remain in the opposition or become a BN-friendly party as the new set of office-bearers would decide on the matter.

"We can't make any decision before the assembly as many things have yet to be settled. Moreover, the decision rests with the new office-bearers as our current president (Edwin Dundang Bugak) has said that he wants young blood to take over," he said when contacted by Bernama.

However, he confirmed that one of the possible options for SNAP was to explore whether it should be BN-friendly, even if it was only at the federal level, or remain as it is until the end of the current chief minister's term.

However, Dr Awang Azman Awang Pawi, political analyst at the Institute of East Asian Studies of Unimas, believes that SNAP would not be accepted into the BN fold because the party was seen as weak.

"What SNAP needs now is a candidate who is highly credible, charismatic and respected by the opponents. It also needs to be viewed as a good political partner.

"Sarawak BN will only want a party that is competitive and stable, with a respected leadership. But at the moment, the party does not have that much-needed character," he said.

Many political analysts believe that the best option for SNAP at the moment is to transform its leadership, reorganise all its branches and reactivate its youth and women's wings.

But before all these can be done, the party is already facing new problems just before this weekend's assembly.

There is accusation that money politics has crept into the tussle for the president's post, with a concerned senior party member reporting that a certain candidate was offering as much as RM3,400 to each delegate to cover the air ticket, hotel room, pocket money and dinner.

Two candidates are in the contest for the president's post after nominations closed on Sept 17.

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