

Sabah PKR healed, ready for polls war, says new chief
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KOTA KINABALU, Oct 15 — Ahmad Thamrin Jaini has promised his faction-fighting days in PKR are over and is determined to help Pakatan Rakyat (PR) break into Barisan Nasional's (BN) Sabah fortress come the next general election.

For the freshly reinstated Sabah PKR chief, his most challenging tasks are to form a "neutral" state leadership lineup within a week and to ensure seat negotiations for the coming polls do not result in three-cornered fights.

But Thamrin, once a key protagonist in a leadership struggle that nearly tore the party's state chapter in half, is now confident that all is well in the Sabah PKR front due to the near nine-month interim leadership by the party's national president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Azizah.

He told The Malaysian Insider that the state's warring factions had long sheathed their weapons and cast aside their grievances with eyes trained on preparations for the coming general election.

"We will now continue what our president has started. My first priority is to get our leadership united," he said when contacted yesterday.

Thamrin was reinstated as Sabah PKR chief on Wednesday, effectively dissolving the 11-member presidential council led by Wan Azizah that was appointed in January this year to end the fractious leadership squabble.

The Libaran PKR division chief was first removed from the post on January 9 following a faction war with Tuaran PKR division chief Ansari Abdullah and replaced by little-known leader Pajudin Noordin. The troubled state chapter was also shaken by a series of desertions, casting the party deeper into crisis.

Pajudin's appointment, which was aimed at forcing all members to close ranks, was however rejected by a majority of division chiefs. The divisional chiefs later banded together to remove Pajudin and call for intervention from PKR's national leadership, resulting in the latter's subsequent defection to Umno.

"This time, things have changed. The friction between all factions has already been resolved with the president's intervention as interim chairman. Everything has settled down, we have all cooled off and we are no longer thinking about our individual issues," said Thamrin.

He promised to be "inclusive" in his selection of candidates to form his state leadership lineup, which he said should be ready within a week.

"I will go through the due process of consultation. There must not be any leader in the lineup that will cause yet another uprising. We must accommodate all, have a fair representation of all races and I am confident that our members are ready to strengthen in unity," he said.

Another uphill task, Thamrin admitted, was the ensure seat negotiations among all opposition parties in the east Malaysian state would result in straight fights with BN.

PR had previously crossed swords with local opposition party Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP), resulting in a three-cornered fight in the Batu Sapi by-election last year.

A similar squabble with another east Malaysian party, Sarawak National Party (SNAP), again saw the federal opposition pact on a collision course with the local opposition party during the Sarawak state polls in April.

Thamrin expressed his willingness to host negotiations with SAPP but stressed that all opposition parties must focus on their sole objective to topple the BN-led government.

“We will be friendly, we will be accommodating but our objective is clear — we want a change in the federal and state governments and to do this, we need to subscribe to this goal,” he said.

Both Sabah and Sarawak have long been described as BN fortresses but observers have predicted a possible shift in the east Malaysian political landscape.

Although BN trounced both PKR and SAPP in the Batu Sapi polls, its victory was hampered by a staggeringly low voter turnout. PKR, on the other hand, first considered the underdog in the race, crept to second place, ahead even of SAPP, despite its “Sabah for Sabahans” rallying cry.

In Sarawak, the April 16 state polls saw the DAP snap up a surprising victory of 12 out of 15 seats contested, a clear indication of the party’s improved strength in the BN stronghold.

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