

Anwar: PKR willing to surrender seats to Sabah opposition parties
The Malaysian Insider
April 14, 2012
By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, April 14 — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim declared today PKR's readiness to surrender some of its traditionally contested seats in Sabah to local opposition parties for the coming 13th general election.

According to Bernama Online, the PKR de facto leader said this was to ensure straight fights in all Sabah seats and give the opposition greater opportunity to break into the Barisan Nasional's (BN) east Malaysian fortress.

PKR and Sabah's key opposition party SAPP (Sabah Progressive Party), which is led by former chief minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee, went on a collision course during the Batu Sapi by-election 2010, turning the fight into a three-way contest against BN.

This resulted in the opposition vote splitting between the two parties, launching BN's PBS (Parti Bersatu Sabah) candidate Datin Linda Tsen Thau Lin to the winning spot with a large vote margin.

But this time, it appears apparent that the Peninsula-based PKR does not want to repeat its mistake in Batu Sapi.

"We (PKR) agree to surrender some of the seats we contested in the previous polls to make way for Sabah's opposition parties, especially SAPP.

"We are also in negotiation with several local political leaders for the same purpose of ensuring one-to-one fights," Bernama Online quoted Anwar as telling reporters today after an economic forum in Tanjung Aru near Kota Kinabalu.

The Opposition Leader also expressed hope that other parties in the PR pact would follow in PKR's lead and stay open to negotiating with Sabah's opposition parties.

He urged all PR parties against issuing statements that would make the federal pact look "too conceited", adding that they all shared similar goals.

"However, we do hope that Sabah's opposition would also support PR's struggle and not practice state-level politics.

"I myself have observed that the political trend here is more towards Sabah-based politics.

"To PR, what is important is the struggle for the people regardless of race, religion and background," the news agency quoted him as saying.

Anwar however kept mum on the opposition's candidate for the position of Chief Minister in Sabah, only saying that the matter would be discussed between PR and Sabah's local parties "when the time arrives"

The Malaysian Insider reported last month that seat negotiations on the opposition front in Sabah was likely to break down with PR and Sabah-based parties heading on a collision course with one another ahead of an election expected by June.

Separate interviews conducted with each contender for the coming polls indicate that neither side is willing to back down from their demands, although all parties have insisted that their "doors are always open".

For the local opposition parties, namely SAPP and State Reform Party (STAR), led by political bigwigs Yong and Datuk Jeffrey Kitingan respectively, consensus is only possible if they are allowed to contest the lion's share of the 60 state seats up for grabs in Sabah.

This, party leaders told The Malaysian Insider recently, is to enable them to push through their "Sabah for Sabahans" agenda, which would see the state reclaim its autonomy.

But for the Peninsula-based PR, largely DAP, all parties should first commit to the federal opposition pact before facing the Barisan Nasional (BN) giants in the polls.

They believe this would strengthen the opposition front in Sabah and on the federal level, as well as help topple the ruling pact from Putrajaya.

For SAPP, the formula is simple — PR contests two-thirds of Sabah's 25 parliamentary seats while SAPP snaps up two-thirds of the state seats. This, they said, is a win-win formula that would enable all parties to achieve their goals in addition to toppling BN.

Federal seats in east Malaysia's Sabah and Sarawak are expected to be BN's focal point come the elections as both states, including the federal territory of Labuan, make up a whopping 57 seats, or 25 per cent of the 222 Parliamentary seats available.

In Election 2008, BN lost its customary two-thirds parliamentary majority largely due to significant losses in the peninsula, where it won just 85 seats while the opposition swept 80 seats.

BN's saving grace was in Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan where the pact trounced the opposition and made a near-clean sweep, winning 55 parliamentary seats to the opposition's two.

Today, following numerous MP deaths and defections, BN holds 138 parliamentary seats while opposition parties, including PR's PKR, PAS and DAP, PSM, SAPP and independents, hold 84 seats in the House.

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