

**Kitingan's STAR to keep 'core areas' from Pakatan  
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By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 1 — Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan is unshaken by the entry of two Barisan Nasional (BN) veterans into the opposition struggle for Sabah, saying his State Reform Party (STAR) will not compromise its "core areas" for any of its political allies.

The well-known politician, whose Borneo agenda is said to be making inroads with the state's Kadazandusun and Murut communities, said there was no reason for STAR to back down from seats where it knows its influence is strong.

He pointed out that for the "greater good" of Sabah, all parties competing on the opposition front must make good on their promise to work together for the purpose of toppling BN and not to assert more power over one another.

"As far as STAR is concerned, we are going to focus in the areas where we feel we are strong. And we will tell them (opposition parties) that we are not going to compromise in our core areas," he said when contacted here yesterday.

"But we are talking with Pakatan Rakyat (PR) in the common interest of working together. We have no choice but to talk.

"Of course, as you know, STAR wants to stand on its own feet... to work with Pakatan as partners and not work under them.... so we are talking about how to deal with this," he added.

Kitingan told The Malaysian Insider that STAR's "core areas" refer to between 22 and 33 seats of Sabah's 60 state seats, many of which are mixed seats with Muslim voters.

The veteran politician has voiced his intention to take on his older brother, Tan Sri Joseph Pairin Kitingan, the president of BN's Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), for the Keningau parliamentary seat — a fight that he lost in Election 2008.

There is no love lost between the two brothers but talk is that the younger sibling has upped the ante against Pairin over the past few years, gaining in strength through his "Borneo Tea Party" movement across Sabah.

Sabah's political landscape experienced a small shake-up over the weekend when two senior BN lawmakers — Beaufort MP Datuk Seri Lajim Ukin and Tuaran MP Datuk Seri Wilfred Mojilip Bumburing — declared their decisions to launch two new political movements aligned to Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

While the federal opposition has celebrated the duo's decision to back their struggle, talk is that the sudden change could deepen the existing seat rivalry among parties in the already crowded opposition front.

One major player is the Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) led by prominent ex-chief minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee, which is said to have already agreed on a power-sharing deal with its political allies in PR.

Kitingan noted that the battle was now more crowded than ever but said the key challenge now was for the opposition to "synchronise and work together".

"If the opposition wants to capitalise on this move by Lajim and Bumburing, they (the opposition) must work together.

"Of course, this would be a very challenging task as, having already laid down their strategies, the equation now has to take into account these additional variables," he said.

But despite the impending seat tussle among Sabah's opposition parties, Kitingan noted with confidence that Malaysians can expect a "wave" in Sabah come the next general election.

He pointed to the growing dissatisfaction among locals with the ruling BN government for its alleged failure to accord Sabah the autonomy it was promised in the Malaysia agreement.

This unhappiness has also resulted from the current deep-seated problem of illegals in Sabah, the state's loss of oil revenue to the federal capital and the failure to protect native customary land rights, Jeffrey added.

Kitingan cited Lajim and Bumburing's exit as a clear indicator of this growing discontent, saying the two men had likely wanted to be a part of the changes in the Land Below the Wind.

"I think BN, if they are not careful, they may lose their fixed deposit here. The energy is here... it is only about managing it," he warned.

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