

Anwar: Pakatan willing to cede Sabah seats to local parties
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By Clara Chooi

PETALING JAYA, Aug 2 — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim repeated today Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) willingness to give way to local opposition parties in Sabah in order to ensure straight-fights in the coming polls.

The PR de facto leader told a press conference here that this was due to the entry of Barisan Nasional (BN) strongmen into the already crowded opposition front in the east Malaysian state.

"Of course... when it comes to the participation of some of these leaders (ex-BN men), we would have to be prepared (to surrender seats).

"I gave a statement before to say that PKR is prepared to surrender seats for these new PR-friendly supporters... we have also seen willingness on the part of PKR, DAP and PAS," he said.

Anwar was commenting on last weekend's announcement by senior BN lawmakers Beaufort MP Datuk Seri Lajim Ukin and Tuaran MP Datuk Seri Wilfred Mojilip Bumburing to quit their party posts and support PR.

The Malaysian Insider reported earlier this week that the duo's exit had intensified the tussle for seats among the federal opposition even as it seeks to loosen the ruling coalition's hold over the East Malaysian state in the general election expected soon.

PR and the local Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) are already close to brokering a power-sharing deal but Bumburing's and Lajim's sudden entry into the game so close to the polls may throw a spanner in the works for the state's colourful opposition front.

When announcing his departure from BN over the weekend, Lajim, a federal deputy minister up until his dismissal last week, also stated his intention to field his men in 17 of the state's 25 parliamentary seats in the coming election.

But this may clash with the PR-SAPP power-sharing deal, which SAPP president Datuk Yong Teck Lee told The Malaysian Insider today included an agreement that would see the peninsula-based PR taking on a larger share of the state's federal seats.

The former Sabah chief minister, however, dismissed this as an "internal issue" for PR to resolve among its three component parties of DAP, PKR and PAS.

"Yes, negotiations have been taking place for some months now so I've alerted the leaders of PKR, PAS and DAP, not only with regards to Lajim and Bumburing's decisions... but also quite a number of other leaders," Anwar said today.

"There is much progress now because we have PAS, PKR, DAP and now the Lajim and Bumburing factor and some others... so if they are committed to the PR agenda, we can concede some of the seats," he said, adding that both men are very popular leaders in the Tuaran and Beaufort parliamentary constituencies.

Anwar noted PR's confidence in winning in a significant number of seats in Sabah in the coming polls but said he would not reveal the pact's projections as yet.

Federal seats in east Malaysia's Sabah and Sarawak are expected to be BN's focal point come the general election as both states, including the federal territory of Labuan, contribute a significant 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 reversals 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 coalition trounced the opposition and made a near-clean sweep, winning 55 parliamentary seats to the opposition's two.

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