

**In run-up to polls, Sabah BN leaders say unfazed by defections**  
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**By Ida Lim and Nomy Nozwir**

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 13 — Barisan Nasional (BN) leaders played down the latest leap of a senior Sabah politician — the third in a month — from its ranks to the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR), saying it had been “expected” and that they were confident of strong voter support for the ruling coalition in the run-up to key national elections.

Senator Datuk Maijol Mahap, a vice-president in BN’s Sabah-based United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun Murut Organisation (UPKO), publicly announced his decision to quit the ruling coalition yesterday before a thousand-strong turnout at his home in Kota Marudu, about 100km away from the state capital of Kota Kinabalu.

“This is something expected but his departure from BN won’t affect the overall strength of BN in Sabah,” Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak, told The Malaysian Insider.

“BN in Sabah is intact and I am confident that BN will win with comfortable victory in the coming state general election. Crossovers won’t erode support to BN because people are suspicious of their motive.

“We have many new and young capable leaders who are loyal to BN that can replace BN leaders who left and support Pakatan,” the Sabah Umno deputy chief said in a text message.

BN’s Abdul Rahman appeared to relish the challenge thrown down by his political foes. He proclaimed Malaysia to be a “democratic country” where a person was given the freedom to join a political party of his choice but in the next breath, he said Maijol was “pursuing his own personal agenda under the guise of serving the rakyat more effectively through different platform (sic).”

Salleh’s BN colleague from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Datuk Liew Vui Keong, was also not surprised by Maijol’s move.

He noted that the politician had been spotted two weeks ago attending former UPKO veteran Datuk Wilfred Bumburing welcome party into PR.

“I can only wish him all the best,” said Liew, who is LDP president.

“Leaving and joining a political party is reflective of the nature of democracy,” he said, adding that “people can come and go” for both BN and PR parties.

Asked about Sabah BN’s strategy to strengthen support in the face of recent crossovers, he said: “We just have to continue to work.”

Liew echoed Salleh in playing down the impact the three recent defections may have on BN’s morale, occurring as they had successively.

Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who had flown to the country’s easternmost state to personally greet and welcome the three renegades in the past two weeks, had

openly declared that there would be more crossovers from the BN "fixed deposit" into PR's ranks in the coming weeks leading to crucial elections that could tip the power in its favour.

"As far as BN Sabah is concerned, we are united in our cause and struggle to make sure that BN continues to govern," Liew told The Malaysian Insider.

Maijol's move yesterday follows in the wake of two other senior BN lawmakers — Tuaran MP Datuk Seri Wilfred Mojilip Bumburing, formerly UPKO's deputy president, and Beaufort MP Datuk Seri Lajim Ukin, formerly an Umno supreme council member.

As with some of his BN colleagues, Liew appeared reluctant to take a swipe at his former ally, saying only "as to the reason why they leave, the rakyat will see for themselves and will judge the motive for leaving."

He hinted however that some of them may have quit BN in hopes of getting a plump political position.

"Some people leave for position and reasons best known to themselves," he said.

Liew's ally from Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), Datuk Johnny Mositun, also chose to keep a tight lip on Maijol's departure.

Contacted for comment, the PBS information chief said he was unable to say anything at this point as he was waiting for further instructions from the leadership.

He only said: "Kalau itu dirasakan baik bagi Maijol, maka baiklah bagi dirinya (If Maijol considers that to be good, then it's good for him)."

Unlike his peers, Sabah BN secretary Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan appeared to relish the challenge thrown down by his political foes.

The Kota Belud federal lawmaker had taken to Twitter to reply to the challenge even before Maijol made his defection announcement official.

"Tak apa, kita tak gentar dgn PR. (It does not matter, we are not afraid of PR),"he tweeted more than 12 hours before Maijol announced his departure from BN.

"We are ready. Bring it on!" he added.

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