

**Musa's 'monopoly' of Sabah may lead to BN's downfall, says ex-Umno man
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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 8 — Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman's iron-clad control of the state, which led to a monopoly of government that brooks no dissent was the last stroke for Datuk Seri Lajim Ukin, the Beaufort MP told Sinar Harian in an interview published today.

The veteran lawmaker's decision to quit his powerful Umno supreme council position last July is seen to have strengthened the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) pact's foothold in Malaysia's easternmost state in the run-up to the 13th general elections, despite it being long regarded as a reliable vote bank for the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition.

"Sabah Umno has already been controlled by its own state Umno liaison chairman Datuk Seri Musa Aman.

"Whatever he does is a monopoly and no one else can criticise," Lajim told the Malay daily, nearly three months after he quit.

He acknowledged that there was tension between him and the chief minister, but attributed it to Musa's personal feelings.

"I respect him as state Umno liaison chief but in personal matters, perhaps he took what I said to heart because I am too vocal in voicing the rakyat's problems and the question of party unity," he told the paper.

He also suggested that Musa had been behind an attempt to remove him from a position of power in 2008, when Beaufort Umno Wanita chief Datuk Azizah Mohd Dun had challenged him for the party division chief position.

"If he felt a grave responsibility, he should have advised the Women's chief not to contest," he was quoted saying.

Lajim told the paper that he had tried to raise the problems within Sabah Umno with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who is also party president previously, but said no action was taken to resolve them despite his reports.

"The prime minister asked me to be patient, but I had a good reason to give him.

"I met the prime minister on December 20 last year and I resigned on July 29 this year.

"Meaning, I had been patient for eight months," the man who had once-proclaimed himself to be a "winnable candidate" told Sinar Harian.

Lajim predicted that many other Sabah BN leaders will quit the coalition once Parliament is dissolved to pave the way for national elections and once the lawmakers find out they have not been nominated to run despite being "winnable candidates".

He told the paper he also believes that PR's policies can help resolve the state's economic and social woes within three years if elected to power, giving as example hiking the state's oil royalties to 20 per cent from the current five per cent it is given by the federal government.

He added that the income from the oil money will help boost wages and state infrastructure, saying Sabah will have a state budget of RM10 billion.

He also said he is confident the opposition bloc will win at least 35 state seats in the general elections that must be called by April next year when the BN's mandate expires.

In a recent survey by independent pollster Merdeka Center last month, Musa's approval ratings fell from 60 per cent in November 2009 to 45 per cent in September, suggesting the BN will be faced with some hurdles in its stronghold ahead of elections soon.

A majority of voters surveyed — 57 per cent — also reported dissatisfaction with Sabah's economic performance.

The independent research house said that voter satisfaction for the state government remained in positive territory at 56 per cent but also reflected a six per cent decline from 62 per cent in November 2009.

But Musa's falling popularity will be cause for concern, with Merdeka Center saying its survey also showed that his declining ratings were most marked among Muslim-Bumiputera voters who are the backbone of the state's Umno support.

Among Muslim-Bumiputeras, Musa's ratings have fallen from 72 per cent in November 2009 to 51 per cent last month.

Voter satisfaction for Najib remains high, with his 75 per cent favourability response just short of the 77 per cent he recorded in November 2009.

The result could mean that the BN machinery will have to rely on the Umno president's popularity to win back a majority of the seats in the state.

Sabah and Sarawak are crucial frontline states which both BN and the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) will have to win in order to take Putrajaya in the next general election.

In Election 2008, BN lost the popular vote in Peninsular Malaysia and analysts say the sentiment remains largely the same in the months leading up to the next elections.

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