

SAPP 'irrelevant', Sabah contest between Pakatan-BN, say leaders
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 12 — Pakatan Rakyat (PR) is confident it does not need a pact with Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) to topple Barisan Nasional (BN) in Sabah, a state considered crucial for the federal opposition pact's dream to wrest federal power in Election 2013.

Both PR and its allies in the two newly-formed Sabah-based political movements APS and PPPS told *The Malaysian Insider* that the fight in Sabah, like all other states in Malaysia, would be centred between BN and PR.

All other players in the battle would be considered too "irrelevant" to make a difference in the opposition vote, they said.

Sabah's opposition front is a particularly crowded one, with PR's three parties — the DAP, PKR and PAS — its new allies APS and PPPS, and two other opposition parties, the SAPP and the State Reform Party (STAR) under political veteran Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan.

All seven political movements had earlier wanted to stand united against BN but following the failure of seat distribution, the polls contest will likely be a three- or four-cornered fight with BN.

APS or Angkatan Perubahan Sabah chief Datuk Seri Wilfred Mojilip Bumburing told *The Malaysian Insider* that the SAPP's refusal to back down from its "greedy" demands to contest at least half of the 60-seat Sabah legislative assembly had led to the breakdown in seat negotiations with PR.

He called the SAPP chief "sour grapes" for starting the verbal warfare against himself and another new Sabah PR ally, Pertubuhan Pakatan Perubahan Sabah (PPPS) chief Datuk Seri Lajim Ukin, after realising that his party's seat demands would be turned down.

Last week, SAPP chief Datuk Yong Teck Lee likened both men to buffaloes led around by their nose rings, saying the duo were forced to kowtow to PR's leaders in the peninsula to lobby for seats in the coming general election.

"I am not in the least bit offended by his remarks. It is just sour grapes. Knowing that his chances with PR are almost nil, he decided to spew nonsense to discredit us," Bumburing said in a phone call with *The Malaysian Insider*

The Tuaran MP added that Yong, a former Sabah chief minister whose party's main agenda is to retain power over Sabah in the hands of Sabah-based parties, was never interested in the opposition's struggle.

"He only wants to join the fight in this manner because he wants to be chief minister again... it is just his personal interest. So he is so desperate to have his way... this is his only chance to become chief minister again.

"But come on, even in Sabah's political history, there have never been straight fights. But despite this, Sabahans have always voted for the two main parties in the battle," Bumburing pointed out.

The known Kadazandusun leader insisted that from his observations in Sabah, even before he left his post as BN's United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun and Murut Organisation (UPKO) deputy president, the coming polls contest would be between BN and PR.

PR, a loose political pact formed after the DAP, PKR and PAS made significant wins in Election 2008, particularly in the peninsula, has been growing significantly in strength and in numbers and has even spread its wings across the South China Sea to east Malaysia to boost support.

"I know for sure that the people are now making up their minds, and for most, their minds have already been made up... so when the campaigning starts, the choice is between PR and BN. SAPP and the others would make little difference.

"SAPP and STAR are only just playing politics in between... they will remain lost in the middle," Bumburing said.

PKR vice-president Chua Tian Chang told *The Malaysian Insider* over the weekend that he agreed with Bumburing that the focus of the coming electoral contest was between BN and PR.

"That was the fight from the very beginning... our expectation was that we all commit to one agenda, and that is for the public to choose between BN and PR.

"We have always been interested in sharing seats with the SAPP but unfortunately, they could not accede to us. So now, we have no choice but to go ahead between PR, APS and PPPS," he said.

Last week, PKR deputy president Azmin Ali said the SAPP has formally been excluded from seat talks with PR due to the Sabah-based party's refusal to back down from demanding to contest at least half the state's 60 seats.

Yong's contention had been that for administrative power over Sabah to remain in the hands of Sabahans, only state-based parties should contest the lion's share of the 60 seats.

Peninsula-based PR, he had said, could take on the majority of Sabah's 25 MP seats, allowing it to represent the state in Parliament and its dream to wrest Putrajaya.

In Election 2008, BN swept 59 of the state's 60 seats and 24 of the 25 MP seats. But later in 2008, SAPP pulled out from BN, taking its two MP and two state seats with it.

The coming polls contest will be a hard-fought one between BN and PR and all eyes will be centred on the polls outcome in Sabah, Sarawak and Johor, the three states where BN still has strong representation.

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