

Sidelined Sarawak reps demand seats in Najib's Cabinet
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By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, May 19 — Overlooked lawmakers in the Barisan Nasional's (BN) East Malaysian vote bank say they should also be aboard Datuk Seri Najib Razak's Cabinet, believing they had earned full ministerial positions after their victorious run in the May 5 polls.

Some 40 branches of Sarawak's SPDP said they will petition the prime minister to consider allocating to them at least one ministerial seat and one deputy minister post, believing Najib's decision to have been an oversight as the party had netted four federal seats for the Barisan Nasional (BN).

"We hope it is an honest oversight as we cannot really imagine it to be any other reasons," SPDP supreme council member James Laju Ambok who was also representing the group was quoted as saying in the Borneo Post today.

He was reported saying the party wanted nothing less what they had been awarded previously and will mount a signature drive and send the petition to the prime minister tomorrow recommending three of their MPs be appointed to the Cabinet.

"We are not asking for more nor pressing our demand here. We just hope to be given what is fitting and justifiable to SPDP," Laju was quoted saying.

In the previous term, SPDP had been awarded the deputy minister of international trade and industry and deputy transport minister posts while Sabah had four ministers and four deputy ministers.

While Najib had picked 12 representatives from East Malaysia to be in his 2013 Cabinet — the largest entourage yet from across the South China Sea — discontent continues to grow among the parties there.

Sarawak BN candidates won 25 out of the 31 federal seats contested with state lynchpin PBB taking four ministerial and three deputy ministerial posts.

PRS was offered a full minister position as well as a deputy minister seat while SUPP has one, even though it lost in the general election.

Yesterday, PRS, which won six parliamentary seats, voiced dissatisfaction with the relatively junior position offered the Dayak party in the federal government.

Datuk Joseph Salang Gandum was offered another turn as deputy minister, this time for the Tourism Ministry but rejected it. His party colleague Datuk Joseph Entulu Belaun reluctantly accepted a Cabinet position as a minister in the Prime Minister's Department, but PRS president Tan Sri James Jemut Masing had said he would speak to Najib for a better position.

"I want to make it very clear here that we are not interested in positions. We are only interested in positions that will be of assistance to the people that we represent. That is important. It must be appropriate portfolios, not just anything," said Masing.

Salang, a PRS vice-president, was more blunt about rejecting the offer of being a deputy minister.

"The least I expect is for the PM not to make the Dayak look like the flower cosmetic. We have to see not just the current situation but also the future. What I see is disconnection in what we aspire to be. We have been misinterpreted or the federal government could have misinterpreted us as well," Salang said.

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