

New Era Beckons For Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party
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BINTULU, Oct 6 (Bernama) -- It was a simple affair but the 11th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP), one of the Barisan Nasional (BN) component parties, ended on a historic and positive note.

After more than four hours, the AGM which was attended by more than 400 delegates at a hotel here, heard party president Tan Sri William Mawan Ikom in his closing remarks pledging to take the party to new heights with the help of grassroot leaders, including the youths.

It was a breath of fresh air for the party which had been making the wrong headlines for internal bickering and is now in the process of strengthening its groundwork again.

And to achieve that objective, Mawan who is state Senior Minister and Social Development Minister, proposed special labs that would discuss a long range of issues that would hopefully outline some of the challenges facing the party in the future.

"The party's supreme council meeting will discuss in a week or two the proposed special labs...young people will be interested," he said when asked to elaborate on the proposal after the closing of the AGM yesterday.

"We want truthful feedback from the special labs that can be used to chart our new direction," he said excitedly, adding that presently party members had only the AGM to voice out their opinions which was quite limited.

Mawan said the proposed labs would be a proper avenue for party members to air their grouses and suggestions without offending anyone as these would be closed-door sessions.

The move has struck the right chord among the members and one loyal party member, Pasang Ngalambai, who has been with SPDP since its formation, has given the thumbs-up to the proposal.

"I noticed at this year's AGM, the mood of the delegates was different. You could see for yourself that many had become out-spoken. This is a good sign and shows the delegates' level of maturity," he said.

Pasang, who hails from Sibiu and is now SPDP Bukit Assek deputy chairman, said even the topics raised by the delegates this time were much more diverse than before, indicating that the party members wanted a stronger presence at the federal and state levels, as well as in the economic and social sectors.

Although the AGM was a one-day affair, Pasang's observation was correct as the venue for the meeting was jam-packed with delegates yesterday and many jostled to get the microphone to air their views in Iban, Malay or English.

Apart from land, the issues raised yesterday included representation in government-linked companies, appointment of federal ministers and women's representation in the party.

Party member Aminah Tanjung, who is from Belawai, said she was quite happy with this year's AGM as the topics raised were wide-ranging, including on women.

"I am glad the leadership is open-minded," she said, smiling.

With the 11th state election looming and to avoid a repeat of internal bickering, SPDP has kick-started its preparation by given a stern warning to party members to respect the top leadership's decisions, especially on the selection of candidates for the election.

The warning came from none other than the outspoken SPDP deputy president and Bintulu MP Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing, who related the "underwear" analogy that drew laughter from the delegates.

Tiong said the prime minister had strict criteria and was meticulous when it came to the choice of candidates for BN.

He also warned those interested to join the party, hoping to be rewarded with financial incentives or posts, to forget about it and go back home to take care of their family.

"He (the prime minister) will personally check whether the candidates proposed by the party qualify or not," he said.

Tiong said the party's primary role now was to identify candidates who could meet the prime minister's criterion of "People First, Performance Now".

"The party wants those who are loyal and willing to sacrifice their time to help the people. This is what SPDP is all about; helping the people anytime and anywhere, hence we must thoroughly vet the candidates' credibility," he said.

And in jest, he added, "to the extent of knowing what type of underwear they wear," to show the party's commitment to coming up with quality candidates.

Currently, SPDP has more than 90,000 members, mostly from the rural areas, and the only Sarawak BN component party that has Putera and Puteri wings.

The other state BN component parties are Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB), Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) and Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS).

For the state election, SPDP has been allocated eight state seats - Krian, Pakan, Tasik Biru, Meluan, Marudi, Batu Danau, Bekenu and Ba' Kelalan.

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