

Keep Umno's brand of racial politics out of Sarawak, Taib tells state BN leaders

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Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud is leaving his post as chief minister with one advice to his successor – that whoever succeeds him must strive to keep Umno and its brand of racially divisive politics out of the state.

Taib's remarks to the Barisan Nasional (BN) supreme council meeting yesterday made it clear that his successor “should stand tough and be unflinching” when dealing with Putrajaya on issues concerning Sarawak's interests.

Sarawak BN secretary-general Datuk Dr Stephen Rundi said Taib told yesterday's meeting that his successor has to vigorously protect the state's rights as spelled out in the Malaysia Agreement of 1963.

“We must stick to the Malaysia Agreement in protecting the rights of the state,” he said of Taib's message at the state BN supreme council meeting in Kuching which gave the chief minister the prerogative to choose his successor.

Rundi said standing up to Putrajaya included stopping Umno from coming to the state, which is widely seen as undermining the 20-point agreement which protects the interests and rights of Sabah and its people when the territory agreed to form Malaysia with Malaya, Sarawak and Singapore. Sabah has a 20-point agreement while Sarawak has a 18-point agreement for the formation of Malaysia.

He said there is no reason for Umno to spread its wings to Sarawak as Taib's Parti Pesaka Bumiputera (PBB) was already doing a good job managing the state and protecting Sarawak's rights as envisaged in the 18-point agreement.

Rundi also said the state's socio-ethnic situation differed from the peninsula's and therefore handling it should best be left to Sarawakians who understand it best.

Taib had over the weekend announced his intention to leave as chief minister and had spent Saturday and Sunday discussing his imminent retirement with his PBB party men and the BN supreme council.

Accusations already abound in the social media with netizens accusing Putrajaya of eroding much of Sarawak and Sabah's rights in the agreements that paved the way for the formation of Malaysia.

Wilfred Nisson, Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS) secretary-general explained that Umno only “understands issues pertaining to the interest of Malays and Islam” while in Sarawak, parties like PBB and his party have to cater for the interests of various ethnic groups and from varying religious beliefs and denominations.

“We have to treat this multi-ethnic, multi-religious make up meticulously in order to maintain the social harmony.

“In Sarawak, we tread a very thin line as we have to feel the sensitivity of the people from the various ethnic groups. There are over 40 ethnic groups in the state.

“Therefore, nobody else can understand this situation better than Sarawakians,” he said, noting that the lynchpin BN party in Peninsular Malaysia in recent years appeared to have a difficult time managing expectations of the various races in the peninsula.

The opposition, particularly DAP, are also against Umno coming to Sarawak.

State DAP chairman, Chong Chien Jen, created a furore in the state legislative assembly at its sitting last November when he accused state Housing Minister Datuk Amar Abang Johari Tun Openg of being pro-Umno and could bring Umno into the state if he becomes the chief minister.

Abang Johari, the deputy president II in PBB, is one of three persons widely speculated could be picked by Taib to be the next chief minister to succeed him.

When Abang Johari demanded Chong, who is the Kota Sentosa assemblyman and Bandar Kuching MP, withdraw the accusation, Chong said he would only do it if the assembly moved a motion to ban the entry of Umno into the state.

Chong's refusal to withdraw led to Special Functions Minister Tan Sri Adenan Satem – another name speculated could be picked by Taib – to instead move a motion to have Chong suspended.

Chong is still suspended from the assembly and Speaker Datuk Amar Mohammad Asfia Awang Nassar had recently said the decision to lift Chong's suspension would only be made when the assembly sits in May.

Chong could miss the first few meetings as Asfia said he would not make the decision outside the House.

Rundi said for Sarawak to insist full adherence and respect for the 18-point agreement does not make Sarawakians any less loyal to the federation.

“We are 100% loyal to Malaysia, we will stay with Malaysia through thick and thin.

“But Sarawak's rights have to be protected,” he told The Malaysian Insider, adding that Umno would not be interested in doing so. – February 10, 2014

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