

Adenan takes over at the helm as Sarawak's 5th chief minister

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The man whose political career was widely seen as dead four years ago was today sworn in as Sarawak's fifth chief minister before the Yang DiPertuan Negeri Tun Abang Muhammad Salahuddin Abang Barieng at the Astana Negeri this morning.

While Tan Sri Adenan Satem, 78, came out of his political deep freeze to assume his new role as the state's chief executive, administering the oath of office was the last official function of Salahuddin, 92, whose tenure as the head of state ends at midnight.

He will be succeeded by Adenan's predecessor and the outgoing chief minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud.

Adenan, when he reports to work on Monday, will have to tackle a by-election for the state seat of Balingian – vacated by Taib.

The by-election could set the benchmark and the tone for Adenan to gauge public mood as he sets his sight on the bigger target – the state election which must be held before June 20, 2016.

State Barisan Nasional and Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) secretary-general Datuk Dr Stephen Rundi today set the tone of BN's intent to match or better Taib's performance in winning the coastal seat near Mukah in the 2011 state election.

“We are confident about retaining the seat but we don't take anything lightly,” Rundi said after witnessing the swearing-in at Astana Negeri.

“We will work very hard (because) we regard everyone, including the opposition, as very strong.”

Taib won the seat of 11,792 mostly Malay-Melanau voters with a 5,154-vote majority in a three-way contest with the most serious challenge coming from his cousin, Datuk Salleh Jafaruddin, who stood as an independent.

Salleh, a former education minister, garnered 1,056 votes.

PKR, who has been picked by the opposition PR to contest the by-election, fielded a housewife, Suriati Abdullah.

She was trounced, garnering only 871 votes and lost her deposit.

Rundi also said PBB has “more or less” a candidate in mind and would use a soon-to-be-called supreme council meeting to ratify the person's candidacy.

“There are so many of them but we more or less have someone.”

One of the names often mentioned is Taib's elder son, Datuk Seri Mahmud Abu Bekir Taib.

When asked after the swearing-in, Abu Bekir said he would serve if called upon.

The front-runner, according to most political analysts, is Perlis mufti Datuk Dr Juanda Jaya.

Former agriculture minister Datuk Seri Effendi Norwawi, once strongly tipped as favourite, has ruled himself out as a candidate.

Juanda, also courted by PKR, is hot favourite as he is from Mukah.

The 43-year-old was Sarawak deputy mufti before his transfer to Perlis in 2009.

The state seats of Balingian and Dalat come under the Mukah parliamentary constituency.

The office of the chief minister completes the roller-coaster political career of Adenan who won a seat in the state legislative assembly in 1978.

He soon made his mark as a savvy politician by being Taib's point man in encouraging native land owners with large tracts of idle native customary rights (NCR) land to participate in government-sponsored large scale land development when he was the assistant minister and later, minister for land development, between 1985 and 1992.

In 2004, Adenan, who is an avid golfer, crazy about fishing and considers himself an amateur historian, took a step into federal politics when he contested in the general election that year for the parliamentary seat of Batang Sadong.

With the win, he then augmented his political and administrative experience when he was made a minister for natural resources and environment in then prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's cabinet.

In a cabinet reshuffle in February 2006, Adenan turned down any post and returned to Sarawak.

That year was a bad one for Adenan because on his return to Sarawak, he had a fallout with Taib – an estrangement that lasted four years.

Despite placing one of the men he had groomed to take over from him in a political limbo, Taib kept faith in him by drawing him back to state politics.

Adenan was asked to contest the new seat of Tanjung Datu in the 2006 state election.

Despite thumping his opponents – an independent and a PKR candidate – to win the seat by more than 4,000 votes, Taib kept Adenan out of the corridors of power until 2010 when he was appointed special adviser in the Chief Minister's Office.

From there, there was no looking back for Adenan.

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