

## **Sabah Umno man says not right time to replace CM Musa Aman**

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**By Robin Augustin**

**Sabah BN backbenchers chairman Abdul Rahim Ismail says ensuring unity and continuity a must in the wake of the challenge posed by opposition parties such as Warisan.**

KOTA KINABALU: If “coffee shop” talk in Kota Kinabalu is to be believed, there will be a new chief minister in Sabah after the next general election.

Dewan Rakyat speaker Pandikar Amin Mulia – who recently declared his intention to get back into active politics – and federal minister Salleh Said Keruak are likely candidates to replace Musa Aman as Sabah chief minister.

For months now, there has been rife speculation that Umno strongman Musa, who is Sabah’s longest-serving chief minister, may be asked to make way for a fresh face in the state, which has the most Umno members in the country.

Salleh is a former Sabah chief minister.

Pandikar, who heads the United Sabah Bumis Association (Usbo), has already embarked on a statewide roadshow to explain various issues to the people.

Last December, Musa, who has been in power since the end of Sabah’s chief minister rotation system in 2003, said the state had 561,617 Umno members, accounting for nearly a seventh of the party’s 3.4 million members nationwide.

“There has always been talk that Musa will be replaced, but obviously that’s all it amounted to — just talk spread by those who want to create disharmony in Sabah Umno.

“I think it’s the same in other states with Umno menteri besar or chief ministers,” said Abdul Rahim Ismail, a veteran Sabah Umno leader, when asked to comment on these speculations.

“In any case, personally, I don’t see any reason why we should try to fix what isn’t broken because Sabah Umno leaders are behind Musa, and he’s been delivering for Umno and BN,” he told FMT in a recent interview.

Rahim, who is also Sabah BN backbenchers’ chairman, said Musa had also closed ranks with BN component party leaders and wings over the years, leading to the coalition’s sweeping victories in the past elections.

In the 2004 and 2008 elections, Sabah BN won 59 out of 60 seats contested. In the 2013 general election, it retained the majority of the seats, despite the opposition gaining some ground and winning 12 of the 60 seats.

With a new opposition party in the state, in the form of Shafie Apdal's Parti Warisan Sabah, Rahim said now was the time to preserve unity in the state Umno to ensure Sabah remained a BN stronghold.

Shafie – the former Umno vice-president who has a strong support base in Sabah's east coast – formed Warisan together with former PKR vice-president Darell Leiking.

The party has since drawn "tens of thousands" of members, including former party leaders and members from PKR, DAP and BN component parties.

Rahim said he was "alarmed" over the alleged support from the illegal immigrant community for Warisan, saying that in his area, illegal immigrants were telling the locals that "their time" will come when Warisan took over the state.

"Some of my members have told me that the illegal immigrants are telling them that they will rule from Papar to Bongawan if Shafie comes to power."

In recent times, Shafie has denied allegations made by some parties that Warisan was a party for illegal immigrants. Shafie is of Bajau-Suluk ancestry.

"I know Shafie has denied that Warisan is a party of illegal immigrants.

"But I think, as the head of an opposition party seeking to rule Sabah, he should come out and tell the people how exactly he intends to resolve the illegal immigrant issue because he hasn't spoken much on a solution."

Rahim said since Shafie had dismissed Warisan's links to illegal immigrants, it shouldn't be difficult for him to declare Warisan's stand on illegal immigrants and how the party would resolve the issue if it came to power.

Sabah's long-standing illegal immigrant issue has been a sore point for many of its people.

In the 1990s, the so called "Projek IC" resulted in a number of identity cards being issued to illegal immigrants.

In December 2014, a Royal Commission of Inquiry report on the matter was released, subsequently leading to the setting up of a technical working committee and a permanent committee to deal with the illegal immigrant problem.

Last December, it was reported that the technical working committee, headed by Sabah Deputy Chief Minister Joseph Pairin Kitingan, was in the final stages of completing its report containing recommendations on addressing the illegal immigrant problem.

Separately, last November, Sabah National Security Council secretary Rodzi Md Saad revealed that some 550,000 undocumented migrants in Sabah had been deported or had left the country voluntarily since 1990.

Aside from the BN, Warisan and Pakatan Harapan, the other political force in the state is the United Sabah Alliance, a coalition comprising Parti Solidariti Tanah Airku (Sabah STAR), Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP), Parti Harapan Rakyat Sabah and Parti Perpaduan Rakyat Sabah (PPRS).

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