

## **GE14: Sabah BN parties mull swapping seats**

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**By Tracy Patrick**

KOTA KINABALU: Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) has not dismissed claims that the party is in the midst of negotiations to swap some seats with other BN parties for the coming general and state elections.

PBS president Joseph Pairin Kitingan told FMT that anything is possible to ensure BN wins all seats contested in the 14th general election (GE14).

He was commenting on FMT's report that the party might swap its Kadamaian state seat with the Bingkor state seat, currently allocated for the KDM-based United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Murut Organisation (Upko).

"There is a strategy when it comes to this. In fact, there is a possibility of a lot of things happening this coming election.

"I am not going to affirm or deny it. The public will know when the right time comes," he said.

Pairin, who is the Keningau MP as well as Tambunan assemblyman, said he was aware of all the speculations in the media.

He said such speculation would make things more interesting as GE14 draws nearer.

At the same time, he said it would also be good for political parties to get feedback from the people on whether certain moves would benefit them.

Although Pairin chose to be evasive on the matter, other PBS members confirmed that Upko had contacted the party to discuss the possibility of swapping several seats, including Bingkor and Kadamaian.

Bingkor, which is under the Keningau parliamentary constituency, has always been considered PBS' stronghold until it was given to Upko in 2004 after PBS re-joined BN in 2002.

It was won by Solidariti Tanah Airku (Star) party president Jeffrey Kitingan in the previous election.

Jeffrey first won the seat in 1999 under a PBS ticket, defeating the BN candidate at the time, Joseph Kurup.

Furthermore, PBS' influence is considerably stronger than Upko in the Sabah interior.

PBS lost the Kadamaian seat to PKR candidate Jeremy Malajad in the previous election. Malajad has since joined another KDM-based party, the Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah, headed by Kurup.

On the additional 13 state seats, Pairin said although there was talk that the seats would not be included in the coming state election, he believed the final decision had not been made.

"We have to wait until the last moment to know. Sometimes, strategic considerations might require that the seats be included. In the meantime, we just have to wait.

"I don't think it would be too late to properly distribute the seats once they are approved. I believe the BN leadership will know what to do."

The former Sabah chief minister, however, only smiled wryly when asked if it was true that the party was hoping to contest in six of the 13 new seats.

He said everybody else seemed to know more about the matter than him.

Previously, PBS acting president Maximus Ongkili had said that PBS would be asking for six of the 13 new seats, especially in constituencies with mixed races.

Other parties looking to increase their quota include Upko, which wants four seats, and Umno says it deserves all 13 seats.

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