

PM DENIES OWNING 'A LOT OF LAND' IN SABAH

By KALIMULLAH
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KOTA KINABALU, Thurs. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad dismissed allegations that he owned "a lot of land" in Sabah and stressed that a victory for Berjaya in the State election was crucial if the "good" Sabah-Federal Government relationship was to continue.

The Prime Minister and Barisan Nasional chairman added that the United Sabah National Organisation (Usno) would never be accepted back into the Barisan because "they stabbed us in the back."

Dr Mahathir was addressing a crowd of more than 5,000 at Kampung Pimping, about 100km from here, on his one-day trip to Sabah to help Berjaya in the State elections for which voting will be held on April 20 and 21.

Among others present were Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah, Berjaya president and Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Harris Salleh and his wife, Datin Rujiah.

Dr Mahathir said that some opposition parties, which he did not name, had been spreading allegations that he was close to Datuk Harris "because I have a lot of land in Sabah."

"I challenge these people to say this openly instead of whispering about it in the villages.

"We will see whether they dare make the allegations in public and are bold enough to face prosecution," he said.

Dr Mahathir praised Berjaya for the development the party had brought to Sabah since it came to power in 1976 and the close relationship between the State and Federal Governments since then.

"Before 1976, Usno ruled and it did nothing. Its leaders were more intent on showing off, flying everywhere in planes funded by the Government.

"I often wondered whether Sabah was being ruled from Lebanon or London as the Usno leaders spent so much time in these two places," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the State's coffers were almost empty when Berjaya took over the Government. "But now, Sabah is the richest State in the country," he added.

He also said that when he had visited Sabah in 1976 as Education Minister, he had received a "very cold reception" from the Usno Government.

"But since Berjaya came to power, we (Federal leaders) are always given a warm reception, like today.

"Our relationship has improved tremendously and only if Berjaya wins can this relationship be maintained," he said.

He added that the Federal Government would not cooperate with any other party because "we are familiar with the honesty and responsible attitude of Berjaya."

He also dismissed allegations that Berjaya was "undemocratic," pointing out that the current State elections was sufficient proof that it was democratic because 172 people had been given the chance to stand as representatives of opposition parties and independents against 48 Berjaya candidates.

He compared the present situation to what happened during the days when Usno ruled Sabah. "Anyone who opposed them was jailed. Even during elections, many candidates did not reach the nomination centres," he said as cries of *Kepayan, Kepayan* — the infamous jail here where prisoners and Usno's opponents were held — filled the air.