

Development in Sabah set to pick up, says Dr Mahathir

KOTA KINABALU, Tues. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the people of Sabah can look forward to more development in the near future under the Barisan Nasional Government.

The Prime Minister said the State's future was bright as there were more development projects and economic activities either being planned or implemented for the benefit of the people.

Speaking to reporters at the end of his overnight visit to Sabah, he said:

"I admit the process of development is probably a little slow, but we are in the process of utilising the allocations for State development.

"I think we will be able to implement a number of projects such as low-cost houses and assistance for the very poor soon," he said, adding that the State's economy so far this year had also been better than the corresponding period last year.

The BN, which took over the state administration on March 17 this year, had during the State election on Feb 18-19, pledged to "bring development" to Sabah State within 100 days.

Dr Mahathir said the Government had also made a decision on allocations to provide electricity and water supply as well as infrastructure facilities to the people in the various parts of Sabah.

He said that it was also obvious that the State economic activities had improved now, compared to before.

"Hotel operators are now happy with the high occupancy rate and the private sector is more active," he said.

"While the existing business activities pick up, new ones are established."

The Prime Minister said Sabah's business climate was generally encouraging now with investors showing a lot of confidence and the number of tourists coming to the State increasing.

"With all facilities for tourists, I am confident Sabah's economy will pick up," he said.

Asked whether the rotation of the post of Sabah Chief Minister among the Muslim Malays, the Chinese and the Kadazan on a two-year term basis would discourage those appointed to work hard in view of the pre-determined period of office, he said:

"If he does not work, we will not select him again to contest (in the election). A Chief Minister must take into consideration the views of others," he said.

Regarding the overlapping claims on the Sipadan and Ligitan islands, Dr Mahathir said he would discuss the issue with Indonesian leaders when he visited the republic on Friday.

He said that at present both Malaysia and Indonesia had not been able to reach an amicable solution over the claim.

"Therefore, we may have to depend on a third party to resolve the matter," he said.

Foreign Ministry secretary-general Tan Sri Ahmad Kamil Jaafar said last week the dispute over the islands could be resolved by a third party such as the International Court of Justice.

However, Indonesian Foreign Affairs director-general (political affairs) Izhar Ibrahim said his country wished to continue discussions on the matter.

The two islands, about an hour's boat ride away from Semporna, Sabah, are havens for deep-sea divers and possess chalets operated by a Sabah-based private firm.

Sabah Chief Minister Tan Sri Sakaran Dandai said stringent procedures were among the reasons for the delay in the implementation of government projects in the State.

He said preparation of contract documents as well as calling for tenders were time consuming.

"I hope these procedures can be relaxed so that there will be no delay in the implementation of development projects in Sabah."

He said the State Government had also requested for more allocation for development.