

New Sabah CM on Dec 28

By Joniston Bangkuai

KOTA KINABALU, Sat. — A new Sabah Chief Minister will be sworn in on Wednesday to succeed Tan Sri Sakaran Dandai who is stepping down and also resigning both his State Assembly and Parliament seats.

A veteran Sabah politician, Sakaran is widely speculated to become Yang di-Pertua Negeri after Tun Mohammed Said Keruak's second four-year term expires on Dec 31. The state constitution limits a Yang di-Pertua Negeri to two terms.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who said on Wednesday that he accepted Sakaran's resignation, today said that he had yet to decide on a candidate to head the Sabah gov-

ernment.

"I am still thinking...it (the question of who will replace Sakaran) is still in my head," he told newsmen at the Kota Kinabalu airport before leaving for Labuan after a three-day private visit to Sabah.

The Prime Minister said Sakaran will officially step down as Chief Minister on Tuesday and his successor is expected to be sworn in the following day.

He said there were "two or three" potential candidates for the post.

Asked when he will make the announcement, the Prime Minister said: "As soon as possible...after I have consulted the parties concerned, I will make the announcement."

On the criteria set for the selec-

tion of the new Chief Minister, Dr Mahathir said he must have the support of the people of Sabah and be capable of continuing the State's development policy.

Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Salleh Tun Mohammad Said, Land and Co-operative Development Minister Datuk Osu Sukam and State Communication and Works Minister Datuk Abdul Ghapur Salleh are among the candidates likely to replace Sakaran.

Salleh, who is the assemblyman for Usukan and Kota Belud Umno division chief, had served briefly as acting Chief Minister while Sakaran was away to per-

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form the Umrah in October.

Osu, the Papar Umno division chairman, is Kawang assemblyman and MP for Papar, while Ghapur who is Merotai assemblyman, heads the Tawau Umno division.

Meanwhile, Sakaran said he would also resign as Sulabayan State Assemblyman and Semporna MP, strengthening speculation that he would be appointed Sabah's Yang di-Pertua Negeri.

"When the time comes and in accordance with the State Constitution, I will have to vacate all my political posts," he told reporters after sending off Dr Mahathir at the Kota Kinabalu airport here.

Sakaran, 64, had on numerous occasions lately made known his intention to step down as Chief Minister.

Asked if he had recommended his successor to Dr Mahathir, Sakaran said it was the prerogative of the Prime Minister to choose who should take over from him.

On Dr Mahathir's call for leaders not to scramble to become Chief Minister, Sakaran said the Prime Minister's advice should be heeded, adding that leaders should not resort to any action detrimental to unity among the people.

Speaking at a dinner hosted in his honour by the State Government here last night, Dr Mahathir said the State would stand to lose if leaders continued to scramble for position and were unwilling to co-operate.