

21 JAN 1996  
Salleh-rotation  
LET BN DECIDE ON CHIEF MINISTERSHIP, SAYS SALLEH

KOTA KINABALU, Jan 21 (Bernama) -- Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Salleh Said Keruak said today all parties should realise that the appointment of the chief minister is at the discretion of the Barisan Nasional (BN) leadership.

"In the present system, the Sabah Chief Minister is not elected by the people, but chosen by the BN leadership. It is not a post to be applied for or elected to but its appointment is at the discretion of the BN leadership," he told reporters at the old airport here.

He was commenting on the differing views of BN component leaders to the proposal to rotate the chief ministership among the three major communities in the state.

About 3,000 Umno members and supporters, carrying placards expressing support for Salleh to continue in his post, were at the airport to receive him when he returned at 10.20am from a one-month vacation overseas.

Salleh, who is Sabah Umno Chairman, said a state BN meeting might be held to further discuss the issue of rotating the post.

He said Sabah Umno had decided against rotating the post among the Muslim Bumiputeras, non-Muslim Bumiputeras and the Chinese.

"We have conveyed the state Umno's stand to the leadership and we will raise this matter again at the state Umno meeting on Jan 27, and we will see then what action needs to be taken," he said.

The proposal to rotate the chief ministership was made by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during the 1994 state election campaign, and Salleh would have to relinquish the post on March 17 this year if it is implemented.

Salleh, who returns to work tomorrow, said he had not been informed of what transpired at the state BN meeting on Jan 8 which was chaired by Acting Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee.

Yong, seen as the person likely to succeed Salleh if the rotation is implemented, told reporters after the meeting that BN components failed to reach a consensus on whether to rotate the post.

Yong and other government leaders of Chinese-led parties were not at the airport to greet Salleh.

Salleh said the state BN should preserve Sabah's political stability and not let the issue of rotation undermine its unity.

"Of course Sabah BN has to make a decision so that this thing will not drag on. I do not consider it as my problem..it is a party problem and I will abide by the party decision," he said.

"The key is to enlighten members on the matter," he said, adding that Dr Mahathir had said the pledge would be honoured unless the state BN unanimously decided otherwise.

Salleh said he did not meet Dr Mahathir and had performed the umrah during his leave. -- BERNAMA