

12 MAY 1996
Salleh-Crisis
NO POLITICAL CRISIS IN SABAH

KOTA KINABALU, May 13 (Bernama) -- Datuk Salleh Said Keruak, who has tendered his resignation as Sabah Chief Minister to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said today no political crisis will arise if the Chief Minister's post is rotated.

Salleh tendered his resignation to fulfill the pledge made by Dr Mahathir to rotate the post of Chief Minister every two years among the three major races in Sabah -- Malays, Chinese and Kadazans.

"If all groups accept the rotation, I don't see any crisis in Sabah," he told reporters here.

Dr Mahathir told the Sabah people during the state election of 1994 that the post would be rotated among the three races if they elected the Barisan Nasional to power.

However the BN lost the election narrowly to the Parti Bersatu Sabah led by Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan.

The BN, however, assumed power in the state about a month later when several PBS assemblymen abandoned the PBS and formed their own parties which were later admitted to the Barisan Nasional or joined existing BN components.

Datuk Pairin resigned and the then Sabah Umno Liaison Committee Chairman Tan Sri Sakaran Dandai was named Chief Minister of the State Barisan Nasional Government.

Sakaran later announced his retirement from politics and was succeeded by Salleh in December 1994. Sakaran was appointed Sabah Yang Dipertua Negeri after Tun Haji Mohamed Said Keruak completed his term of office.

Under the rotation system, Salleh's turn as Chief Minister representing the Malay community ended on March 17 but the Prime Minister decided to extend his term pending amendment to the State Constitution to limit the powers of the Chief Minister.

The Prime Minister recently announced that Salleh had tendered his resignation as Chief Minister and would be succeeded by Datuk Yong Teck Lee representing the Chinese community.

Yesterday Dr Mahathir said the appointment of Yong, who is President of the Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP), as Sabah Chief Minister would depend on the outcome of his court case which is to be heard on May 21.

Yong, together with four others, is facing a charge under the Police Act, of taking part in an illegal procession during the general election of 1990.

If Yong was convicted and fined up to RM2,000, he would be disqualified as an assemblyman and hence lose his chance of becoming Sabah Chief Minister.

Earlier, Salleh and his wife Datin Raya Erom were at the Sabah Medical Centre to celebrate Mother's Day and Nurse's Day.

There was also a celebration at the centre to mark Raya's successful operation at the centre on Thursday.

Several children from the Sekolah Bukit Harapan were also present at the party. Raya is the patron of the school which is for mentally retarded children.--BERNAMA

OPP AAM