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Mahathir-Sabah

YONG TECK LEE TO TAKE OVER AS SABAH CHIEF MINISTER

MELAKA, May 3 (Bernama) -- Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) president Datuk Yong Teck Lee will be appointed as the new Sabah Chief Minister as soon as possible, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the appointment has to be made fast following the decision of Datuk Salleh Said Keruak to step down from the post.

Salleh's resignation is in keeping with a promise made by the Barisan Nasional (BN) at the 1994 state election to rotate the chief ministership every two years among the three main communities in the state -- the Muslim Bumiputeras, non-Muslim Bumiputeras and the Chinese.

"He (Salleh) had given me an undated letter (to resign) right from the start and it was up to me to enter a date. We have to pick a new Chief Minister as soon as possible," Dr Mahathir told a news conference here at the end of his two-day working visit to Melaka.

Salleh, who took over as Chief Minister from Tan Sri Sakaran Dandai in December 1994, announced his intention to step down today after a meeting between Sabah BN leaders and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in Kota Kinabalu.

The BN had promised to rotate the chief ministership if it succeeded in toppling the then ruling Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) in the February 1994 polls.

In the event, PBS was returned with a simple majority but the government it formed collapsed within weeks due to mass defections by its assemblymen, and the BN took over.

Sakaran, the then Sabah BN chief, was appointed as Chief Minister representing the Muslim Bumiputera community but he stepped down in December 1994 to become the Sabah Yang di-Pertua Negeri. Salleh succeeded him and was supposed to serve out the two-year rotation term until March 17 this year before handing over to another leader of the state BN.

Despite calls by various quarters in the state, particularly Umno, to retain Salleh as Chief Minister, Dr Mahathir said the rotation process could only be scrapped if all the state BN component parties agreed to it.

The Prime Minister said a new Chief Minister had to be appointed since the state BN could not obtain the agreement of all its members.

He said although Sabah Umno favoured the proposal to scrap the rotation, other BN parties which represented the non-Muslims opposed it.

On the BN's proposal to amend several state laws to curb the powers of the Sabah Chief Minister, he said the amendments would go ahead.

"The amendments need to be made so we can determine what the powers of the Chief Minister are.

"We don't want any vagueness (in the laws) that can cause something to be done that is not in line with government policies," he said.

The amendments were supposed to be tabled in the State Assembly last month but the session was postponed to June 17 and 18 after many BN assemblymen asked for more time to study the proposals.

The laws to be amended are the Forestry Enactment 1968, Land Ordinance Chapter 69, Mining Ordinance 1960, Yayasan Sabah Enactment 1966 and the Delegation of Power Enactment 1963. -- BERNAMA

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