

19/08/1997

CM rotation system `working well`

KOTA KINABALU, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the system of rotating the Chief Ministership every two years among the three main communities in Sabah had worked very well.

Speaking at a news conference at the Kota Kinabalu International Airport old terminal before leaving for Miri after a two-day official visit to Sabah, Dr Mahathir said the rotation system had not led to "fighting" among the leaders in the State.

"It's working very well ... I don't see them fighting," he said. Turning to Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee, who was seated next to him, he jokingly said: "You see, he has not been punched yet."

The Barisan Nasional had, during the State election in March 1994, promised to rotate the Chief Minister's post among the Muslim Bumiputera, Chinese and the non-Muslim Bumiputera.

When the BN took over the State administration following the collapse of the Parti Bersatu Sabah government in April after several of its assemblymen defected to the BN, the promise was fulfilled.

Tun Sakaran Dandai, who is now the Yang di-Pertua Negeri of Sabah, was the first Chief Minister to be appointed under the system.

When Sakaran was appointed as Yang di-Pertua Negeri in November 1994, Datuk Salleh Tun Said took over the Chief Ministership to complete the two-year term for the Muslim Bumiputera.

In May last year, Salleh resigned to pave the way for Yong's appointment as Chief Minister representing the Chinese.

A non-Muslim Bumiputera from among the Kadazandusun leader will be appointed to take over from Yong when his term ends in May.

Asked if the rotation system would be continued after Yong's term expired, as it would be only about 10 months before the next State election, Dr Mahathir said the BN was prepared to face election at any time.

"We are not talking about the Chief Minister, we are talking about the BN facing election ... whoever is the Chief Minister won't affect our chances in the election," he said.

On the recent minor reshuffle of the State Cabinet, the Prime Minister said it did not mean that the rotation system was wrong.

He said the reshuffle might have been necessary as a certain Cabinet Minister was better in another Ministry.

In the recent reshuffle, Rural Development Minister Datuk Yahya Hussein swapped portfolios with Communication and Works Minister Datuk Dayang Mahani Tun Pengiran Ahmad Raffae.

On reports of irregularities in the approval of timber concessions, Dr Mahathir said he could not deny that such problems existed and that he would discuss with Yong how to address them.

However, he said, it was clear that there had been progress in the management of forests in the State, adding that there was more replanting of trees now than before.

(END)