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Umno convention

PM TO OPEN SABAH UMNO CONVENTION

KOTA KINABALU, Aug 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will open the largest ever Sabah Umno convention here tomorrow amid an apparently stable political climate.

Rumours of early state elections have faded into the background even as the opposition tried to capitalise on it. The present Sabah State Legislative Assembly ends its term in March 1999.

The three-day convention, themed "Towards appreciation of the party culture", is seen as important for enhancing the solidarity and spirit of the party members.

It would also be right on target with the party leaders' calls for a change in the state's political culture.

Information Chief Datuk Karim Ghani said more than 1,500 delegates are expected to attend the convention where they would discuss the party's performance in Sabah together with various other political and economic issues.

"Delegates chosen from each division would be given 15 minutes to air their views on various issues in the state," he said.

As of two years ago, Sabah Umno's 360,000 membership was the largest among all the states in the country.

Umno spread its wings to Sabah in February 1991, a few months after Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) left the Barisan Nasional (BN).

In a year, it had registered more than 200,000 members becoming one of the states with the largest membership.

In March 1994, Sabah Umno and eight other BN component parties formed a coalition state government after the PBS lost the majority it won a month before after several of its elected representatives switched camps to BN.

The new state government brought along with it a rotational system for the chief ministership between the Muslim Bumiputera, non-Muslim Bumiputera and Chinese communities in Sabah.

The first chief minister under this system was Tun Sakaran Dandai, who was later succeeded by Datuk Salleh Said Keruak when he became the Yang Dipertua Negeri.

Salleh was subsequently succeeded by Datuk Yong Teck Lee as Chief Minister for the Chinese quota.

Yong's term ends in May next year to give way to a non-Muslim Bumiputera Chief Minister. -- BERNAMA

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