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Mahathir-Rotation

APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF MINISTER NOT BASED ON CANDIDATE'S POSITION, SAYS PM

KOTA KINABALU, Feb 20 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the appointment of the Sabah chief minister under the rotation system, introduced following the 1994 state election, need not necessarily be based on the position of a candidate.

"What we have promised is a rotation among the three ethnic groups. Whether he is a deputy (chief minister) or not a deputy (chief minister) is another question," he said at a news conference at the end of his two-day visit to the state.

Under the system, Sabah's three major ethnic groups -- Muslim Bumiputera, the Chinese and non-Muslim Bumiputera -- will each head the state's administration for a period of two years.

The rotation system was proposed by Dr Mahathir in the run-up to the state election.

Datuk Yong Teck Lee's term expires end of May and there is speculation that either Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Kurup, who is the president of the Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS), or State Tourism and Environment Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, who is president of Parti Demokratik Sabah (PDS), will be the non-Bumiputera candidate for the post.

PDS has 11 seats while the PBRS has two seats in the Sabah State Legislative Assembly.

Dr Mahathir, when asked whether he has identified the candidate to take over from Yong, said in jest: "If I have, I don't tell you."

Asked for his views on the rotation system, he said: "Looks like the system is working well...there isn't much problem.... There are some problems, but I expect that is normal. Even without such a system there will still be some problems."

Dr Mahathir said that he was happy with the progress attained in Sabah under the BN. "We found that wherever we went, the people of Sabah are more hospitable. So things have improved considerably," he added.

Earlier, Yong told the Sabah BN convention that Umno, as the largest political party forming the backbone of the BN, had made a "big sacrifice" in the chief minister's rotational appointment for the state.

He said that this new approach had also freed Sabah from the fear of any particular community facing difficulties in any change of leadership in the administration.

He described this leadership change as the "curse of the pendulum" in Sabah's politics.

"Each time the pendulum swings from one direction to another, it will bring adverse effect to the other group," he said.

Yong said that as in the case of Sabah's politics, each time there was a change of administration, it caused the particular ethnic group to face difficulties.

However, he said, the present appointment system of the state chief minister had put an end to all that, and Umno's role in making this system a success was truly a big sacrifice which must be appreciated by all the parties involved.

"The old culture has changed and there now exists a new political culture founded on such values as trust, commitment, discipline and progress," he said.

In the past, he said, the state party leaders only made promises, without the intention and sincerity to fulfill them, but the situation had

now changed.

Umno implemented the system with the appointment of Tun Sakaran Dandai as its first chief minister, followed by Datuk Salleh Said Keruak when Sakaran became the Yang Dipertuan Negeri.

Yong was appointed on May 28, 1996 and is to be replaced by a non-Muslim Bumiputera two years from that date. -- BERNAMA

JS AR RM