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Dr M gets mandate to choose next Sabah CM (HL)

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KOTA KINABALU, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said State Barisan Nasional component parties had given him the mandate to choose the next Chief Minister to succeed Datuk Yong Teck Lee whose two-year term ends on May 27.

Dr Mahathir, who met BN component party leaders at the Shangri-La Tanjung Aru Resort, said they gave an undertaking that they would support whoever was chosen.

Dr Mahathir also met BN State Assemblymen.

Speaking to reporters after the two separate meetings, Dr Mahathir said he would name the new Chief Minister after he returned from his official visits to Egypt and Sudan.

However, he said the next Chief Minister would be a non-Muslim Bumiputera, thus affirming that the rotation system was still in place.

The Prime Minister leaves for Egypt tomorrow where he will also attend the Group of 15 summit. He will be in Sudan from May 13 to 16.

The next Chief Minister will complete the first round of the rotation system implemented in 1994 when the BN took over the State administration from Parti Bersatu Sabah.

The nine BN component parties in Sabah are Umno, Parti Demokratik Sabah, Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat Bersatu, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah, Liberal Democratic Party, Sabah Progressive Party, MIC, MCA, and Gerakan.

All State BN component party leaders were present except for Gerakan, which was represented by its national secretary-general Tan Sri Chan Choong Tak.

Under the rotation system, the Chief Ministers will be chosen for a two-year period each from among Muslim Bumiputeras, Chinese and non-Muslim Bumiputeras.

"I came here to listen and speak to the leaders to explain the need for a very strong Government in Sabah.

Firstly, because we are facing economic problems and secondly because the new Chief Minister will preside over the next State election."

The current term of the State Assembly expires in March next year.

Dr Mahathir said he did not foresee any problem with the appointment of the new Chief Minister because the BN component parties in Sabah were mature and understood the concept of the ruling coalition.

Asked whether he had any specific candidate in mind, he said on a lighter note:

"Yes, somewhere in the mind. I have not identified exactly which part of the brain the name is and this is very disappointing."

On the criteria for the new Chief Minister, Dr Mahathir said: "He should command the support of the majority and think of himself as a Sabahan and Malaysian."

Dr Mahathir said the rotation system had worked very well and it would be continued even after the next State election.

On suggestions that the Chief Ministers used their two-year term to gather wealth, Dr Mahathir said there was no truth to such allegations.

"I don't think Datuk Salleh (Said) is very rich. Is he using a Rolls Royce?"

Salleh was the first Chief Minister under the rotation system, having been appointed in 1994. He resigned in 1996 to allow Yong to take over.

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