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Mahathir - Sabah

MAHATHIR WANTS MAXIMUM STATE-FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS

KOTA KINABALU, June 5 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he wants to see maximum communication between the Federal and the Sabah state government.

Dr Mahathir said he had spoken to the Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok on the matter and both agreed there should be maximum communication between both the governments "so that when we do things, we do it together."

"I have also spoken to Datuk Osu Sukam (Sabah Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister-designate) and I think he understands the importance of working together in the Sabah government and in the Barisan Nasional (BN)," Dr Mahathir told reporters here.

The prime minister, who was returning from a working visit to Japan, was on a 30-minute stop-over at the old terminal of the Kota Kinabalu International Airport here en route to Kuala Lumpur.

Dompok was among state dignitaries who were at the airport to meet the prime minister.

Dr Mahathir, who is also BN Chairman, said cooperation among leaders and BN components in Sabah was vital as much problems needed to be addressed such as improving the state's water and power supplies.

"Also we need to manage the finances of Sabah very well because these are hard times. You can't chop trees the way you chop them before. So we must be very careful," the prime minister said.

On Osu's job change from a federal to a state ministership, Dr Mahathir said Osu could serve as a bridge linking Sabah and the federal government.

Osu, who recently resigned as federal Land and Cooperative Development Minister, will be sworn in on Monday.

"Osu is from the (Federal) cabinet and so is Dompok. So they both are familiar with how we do things in the cabinet. Therefore I don't see any problem," he said.

Dompok was Minister in the Prime Minister's Department between August 1994 and April 1995.

Asked on the vacant Land and Cooperative Development Minister's post following Osu' posting to Sabah, Dr Mahathir said he would give the matter a thought.

On whether the post would be reserved for Umno or a leader from Sabah, Dr Mahathir said: "It's both for Umno and Sabah. But we've not made a decision yet."

Dr Mahathir also said having four presidents of BN component parties in the state cabinet would reinforce the coalition's position in facing an impending state election.

Dr Mahathir said: "Obviously, the election is very much on our mind when we do this... we need the strongest possible combination."

They are chief minister Dompok, who is Parti Demokratik Sabah (PDS) president; Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Kuruk (Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRIS)); Minister in the Chief Minister's Department Datuk Yong Teck Lee (SAPP-Sabah Progressive Party) and Agriculture and Fisheries Minister Datuk Pandikar Amin Mulia (Akar Bersatu).

Dr Mahathir was also asked about Yong's re-appointment to the Dompok cabinet compared to the case of former chief minister Datuk Salleh Tun Said, who was not reappointed to a state ministership after the power transfer from a Muslim Bumiputera to a Chinese leader two years ago under a

rotating power-sharing arrangement.

To this the prime minister said: "This was because he (Salleh) needed a rest. As such I did not force him. But I've spoken to Yong and he said he could still contribute and would be content with just a normal ministership."

"While he (Yong) carries out his government responsibilities, he still has time for other things, including party matters," Dr Mahathir said.

Yong relinquished the chief minister's post last May 28 to make way for Dompok's appointment to the job under a unique two-year rotation between each of the three main racial groups in Sabah -- the Muslim Bumiputera, the Chinese and the non-Muslim Bumiputera.

-- BERNAMA

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