

14/08/1998

Opportunity for Dompok to offer PDS as an alternative to PBS

Joseph Bingkasan

PARTI Demokratik Sabah's congress to be opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Kota Kinabalu today is seen as an important gesture to the party, the community and PDS president and Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok.

Although Dompok's appointment as Chief Minister in May was to honour the rotation system, implemented in 1994, he is regarded as a Chief Minister representing the Kadazandusuns, made up of some 40 ethnic groups found only in Sabah. Under the system, leaders from the three main communities - Muslim Bumiputera, non-Muslim Bumiputera and Chinese - take turn at helming the Government.

PDS founder member and vice-president Datuk Wences Angang, however, stressed that the Chief Minister serves all the people of Sabah.

Angang said Dompok's role was no different from that of Tun Sakaran Dandai, Datuk Salleh Tun Said (Muslim Bumiputera representative) or Datuk Yong Teck Lee (Chinese community representative) who had served all the communities when they headed the State Government.

Salleh said the Chief Minister, aided by cordial working relationship with Federal leaders, would bring about more development, progress and political stability in Sabah.

"Having had the opportunity to serve as chief executive of the State Government, I know there are bound to be allegations of (leaders) only looking after orang sendiri but in the BN (Barisan Nasional) this does not hold water," he said.

Salleh said having Dr Mahathir open the PDS congress would be another endorsement of Dompok's leadership, to which the Kadazandusuns must and should feel honoured.

Another PDS founder member Alex Martin said it was not unusual for the national coalition chief to open BN component members' annual general meeting or congress.

"But for PDS this is a recognition from a worldwide respected leader to a party that represents the majority of the natives of Sabah," Martin said.

A political analyst Wilfred Madius Tangau said for a PDS function to be opened by the Prime Minister for the second time was something the party could be proud of.

He said the first time Dr Mahathir attended a PDS function was the party's inaugural congress in 1995 at Dewan Tun Fuad Stephens in Penampang, a predominantly Kadazandusun district.

"The Prime Minister announced the acceptance of PDS into Barisan Nasional ... Dr Mahathir also described PDS as a Kadazandusun-based party," he said.

Tangau said what the Prime Minister said in 1995 was significant to PDS and also the State BN as the time has come for the coalition to face the people for a new mandate.

The State election will have to be held between now and next March, and this time around Dompok as the State BN chairman has the task of "being a captain going to war".

The congress today will be Dompok's opportunity to call on the people of Sabah, particularly the Kadazandusun, to be united, and to fully support the BN and the Federal Government under the leadership of Dr Mahathir and his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Tangau said PDS being second to Umno in terms of number of elected members in the State Legislative Assembly has an important role to play in ensuring BN victory in the State election.

PDS has 11 seats while Umno has 21 assemblymen. The other BN components with seats are Sabah Progressive Party (five), Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat Bersatu (three), Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (two) and MCA (one).

Liberal Democratic Party and Gerakan are not represented in the State Legislative Assembly. Others in the assembly are an independent and four representatives from Parti Bersatu Sabah.

The PDS congress is a platform for PDS and Kadazandusun leaders to show unity for the betterment of the community and pave the way for a convincing victory for the BN in the coming election.

PDS can be the alternative Kadazandusun-based political party to former Chief Minister Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan's PBS.

The Kadazandusuns now have a choice and it is Dompok's task to impress upon his community that PDS, being in the BN's fold, is the best alternative.

There is no other appropriate forum for Dompok to do so than the PDS congress today, in the presence of Dr Mahathir and other BN component member leaders.

(END)