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PDS (Special Report)

PDS CONGRESS - A WAKE UP CALL TO THE KADAZANDUSUN COMMUNITY

By: Newmond Tibin

KOTA KINABALU, Aug 11 (Bernama) -- The fourth congress of the Parti Demokratik Sabah (PDS) scheduled here for Friday is perhaps its most important since its formation four years ago.

It is so, not only because its president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok is now the Sabah Chief Minister but also because the PDS occupies the driving seat to propel the mechanism of "power sharing" practiced by the Barisan Nasional (BN).

It is also crucial because the PDS, the second largest component party of the Sabah BN, is seen as a key factor in bringing the Sabah non-Muslim Bumiputeras, particularly the Kadazandusuns, fully into the BN fold.

The community's support for the BN seems to be improving of late thanks to the successful implementation of the rotation system where a representative of the three major communities in Sabah -- Muslim Bumiputeras, Chinese and non-Muslim Bumiputeras, serves as Chief Minister for a two-year period.

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

In drumming up Kadazandusun support for the BN, the BN will rely heavily on the PDS, a Kadazandusun-based BN component party, observers said.

"What happened in the 1995 Parliamentary election is behind us," said PDS assemblyman for Kiulu, Gisin Lombut.

"We have to regroup to fight the next battle -- the state general election. If the community's leaders can get together and consider the greater interests of the people instead of looking after their own interests, the battle can be won."

He felt that one party rule would not work in Sabah anymore.

"Take for example Sarawak, the multi-party system worked very well and they made a clean sweep in the last state election," he said.

Gisin, a former political secretary to the then Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan said the Sarawak experience was a clear manifestation of the non-muslim Bumiputera confidence in the BN.

The PDS with 11 seats in the current State Assembly, is the second largest party in the coalition after Umno which has 21 seats. The other state BN component parties are Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) (Parti Maju Sabah), Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS), Akar Bersatu, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), MCA, Gerakan and MIC. The last three are not represented in the Sabah Legislative Assembly.

In preparing for the state election, Dompok has his eyes firmly fixed on the party's fourth Congress which will be opened by Prime Minister and BN Chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

High on the list of issues expected to be deliberated at the congress which is expected to be attended by about 2,000 delegates are the importance of power sharing in a multi-racial society.

Analysts said the BN government, particularly Umno, had kept its promise to rotate the Chief Minister's post and thus the onus now lies with the Kadazandusun community to do its part by giving a strong mandate to the BN.

"We must not forget that the foundation of our economic and political stability depends very much on the unity of all the races in the country," said local community leader Lutiyllydia Kuntong from Betong, Tambunan.

"We do not want our community to be left behind in the national

mainstream. So the PDS is actually moving on the right track," she said.

On Dompok's shoulder lay the task of promoting further the politics of consultation as against politics of confrontation, said a party member.

Undoubtedly Dompok has led the Kadazandusun community to new heights of progress, he said.

He was instrumental in having the Kadazandusun Language taught in primary schools in Sabah for the first time, a feat that took him two-and-a-half years after the PDS joined the BN.

"This is a victory for the Kadazandusun community as a whole. It shows that the BN really cares for us. What was only a dream before is now a reality," said Iyan Balantis, 28, a primary school teacher.

The establishment of the Kadazandusun Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), was another milestone for the community.

"Sabah cannot afford politics of confrontation. We want constructive politics of development where the focus will be on resolving problems faced by the people," said Dompok who is the Moyog assemblyman.

"Our greatest challenge now is to be united and to support efforts by the nation's leaders to improve the economy. If we cannot unite and cooperate to solve the economic problems, no one else can help us," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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