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Mahathir-Rotation

ROTATION SYSTEM TO GO ON, SAYS PM

KOTA KINABALU, Aug 15 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Barisan Nasional (BN) power-sharing concept practised in Sabah will proceed for as long as the people in the state want it to go on.

"The rotation system will continue unless they (the Sabahans) themselves feel that it is no longer necessary to do so," he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a news conference at the old terminal of the Kota Kinabalu Airport before leaving for Kuala Lumpur after a three-day visit to the state and the Federal Territory of Labuan.

Among those present at the airport were Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, Deputy Chief Minister and Sabah Umno liaison committee chairman Datuk Osu Sukam, state cabinet ministers, head of federal and state government departments and state leaders.

The prime minister said that the power-sharing concept whereby the post of chief minister was rotated among the three major communities in the state had proceeded smoothly with all the BN component parties giving their full cooperation.

The concept was proposed by him during the run-up to the state election in February 1994 to provide an opportunity for a representative of the Muslim Bumiputeras, the Chinese and non-Muslim Bumiputeras in the state to head the government.

The first under the rotation system to hold the chief minister's post was Tun Sakaran Dandai of Umno who held the post from March 1994. He was replaced by Datuk Salleh Tun Said in December the same year when Sakaran was appointed the Yang Dipertua Negeri.

Datuk Yong Teck Lee, representing the Chinese community, took over the post in May 1996 and he was replaced by Dompok, who represents the non-Muslim Bumiputera community, on May 28, this year.

Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman, was also asked to comment on speculation that the state election will be held in October this year. The state election has to be held by March next year when the term of the present state government expires.

In jest, the prime minister said: "I am seriously looking at September, October, November...until March next year."

On the chances of BN's victory in the next state election, he said that at present there was strong unity in the BN and if this could be maintained there was a good chance of the BN winning the election.

Asked to comment on the possibility that the opposition may raise the issue of the economic crisis to garner support, Dr Mahathir said that the BN could bring up the case of the poor situation in Sabah during the previous government led by the opposition.

Dr Mahathir also said that the BN component parties in Sabah could propose the name of their candidates to be fielded in the state election but he would make the final decision.

He however said that in the past, his decisions on candidates would be readily accepted.

On whether all the nine BN component parties in Sabah will be represented, he said that the matter had not been decided.

Regarding the vacant post of deputy chairman of the Sabah Umno liaison committee following the resignation of Datuk Abdul Ghapur Salleh recently, Dr Mahathir said that it would be discussed later.

-- BERNAMA  
JS ES RM