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Salleh: Former opposition supporters now favour BN

KOTA BELUD, Fri. - Kadazandusun, Murut and Rungus, former die-hard supporters of the opposition, have mostly switched their allegiance to the Barisan Nasional, Former Chief Minister Datuk Salleh Tun Said said today.

He said they now realise BN's sincerity in bringing progress and development to Sabah on par with other States in the country.

Salleh said the Kadazandusun, Murut and Rungus, the majority of whom supported the Opposition in the past, were now rallying behind the State BN Government.

"I certainly do not agree if anybody says constituencies with these communities as the majority are a foregone case for the BN in the State elections which has to be held by March next year."

Addressing a meet-the-people gathering at Kampung Lasau in Kadamaian, a predominantly Kadazandusun constituency, the Kota Belud member of Parliament said he was confident the people would support the BN.

Salleh, who is also Kota Belud BN chairman, said some people might base their pessimism on the results of the 1995 parliamentary elections when the Opposition, Parti Bersatu Sabah, won in eight, mostly Kadazandusun, Murut and Rungus areas, out of the 20 seats at stake.

"But the situation since has changed and these communities have now realised the sincerity of the BN Government in power-sharing."

He cited the appointment of Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, a Kadazandusun, as Chief Minister, the teaching of Kadazandusun language in schools and the awards of State scholarships as examples which helped bring about the mood swing.

On comments by certain quarters that the results of the recent Arau parliamentary by-election showed that there was no such thing as a safe seat, Salleh said the situation in Arau and Sabah was not the same.

"Arau is an isolated case," he said. Salleh also said the political history of Sabah has shown that the Kadazandusun, Murut and Rungus had never been anti-Federal or anti-BN.

History showed that these communities were generally a tolerant, reasonable and moderate lot except for a handful of selfish leaders who provoked them for political gains.

"These communities have nothing against the BN and having them vote for the ruling coalition is not something impossible."

On the emergence of Parti Bersekutu, a new political party now headed by another former Chief Minister Datuk Harris Salleh, he said it would not spoil BN's chances in Muslim areas.

Salleh, who is also Umno supreme council member, also called on Malaysians in Sabah to give their wholehearted support to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in helping the nation overcome its economic problems.

Saying that the economic downturn was created by outsiders jealous of Malaysia's success, he said to win the battle against them, Malaysians must be united under one leadership.

"We must be together in good and bad times."

Salleh said Malaysians owe a lot to the nation in general and the Prime Minister in particular.

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