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Rotation (with pix)

KURUP OR DOMPOK, THAT'S THE QUESTION

A news analysis

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KOTA KINABALU, March 3 (Bernama) -- Come May or June Sabah will have a new chief minister yet again: this time a leader from among the Kadazandusun community.

This is by virtue of the third phase of the system of rotating the state chief ministership from among Sabah's three major communities.

The system, devised by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is to provide opportunity for each of the community leaders -- Muslim Bumiputera, Chinese and non-muslim Bumiputera -- to be at the helm for a period of two years.

Unlike the previous two phases, no one in Sabah can pinpoint who among the two Kadazandusun leaders in the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition will be in the hot seat.

One is Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS) president Datuk Joseph Kurup, who is also Deputy Chief Minister.

The other is State Tourism and Environment Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, president of Parti Demokratik Sabah (PDS).

Political observers here could not easily draw the comparison between the two equally prominent figures.

They said Kurup has an edge over Dompok in that he is holding the senior post in the Sabah cabinet although the party has only two seats including his, in the State Legislative Assembly.

Dompok's party has 11 members in the House, not to mention the success of the PDS in bringing development to the Kadazandusun community by setting up the Kadazandusun Language Foundation, Kadazandusun Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) and getting the Kadazandusun language introduced in Sabah schools beginning from last year.

In the first two phases, the incoming chief minister was appointed by promoting the incumbent deputy chief minister.

Datuk Salleh Said Keruak took over from Tun Sakaran Dandai after Sakaran was appointed the Yang Dipertua Negeri and Datuk Yong Teck Lee (the present Chief Minister) succeeded Salleh when the turn for a Muslim Bumiputera leader was over.

If this is to be the tradition Kurup has the edge over Dompok.

But, Dr Mahathir recently indicated that the appointment of the new chief minister should not necessarily follow that trend or tradition.

"We promised for the post of Chief Minister to be rotated from among the leaders of the three major communities. The question of whether the candidate should be a deputy chief minister or not is a different issue altogether," Dr Mahathir had said.

The prime minister's statement is seen by political observers as an opener for Dompok to break the tradition of a deputy chief minister taking over from the outgoing chief minister.

On the other hand, the observers said Kurups's chances are still there because the prime minister did not say that a deputy chief minister could not be appointed chief minister.

"People are going to associate the appointment of the third chief minister with the next election. The question is when will he be appointed, after or before the state election," said an observer.

He said an election held in 1999 would mean that the new chief minister from the non-Muslim community would lead the government for less than a year.

On the other hand, the observer said, holding the election before the appointment of the new chief minister would mean that the non-Muslim chief minister would have two complete and uninterrupted years at the helm.

May is a much awaited month for the Kadazandusuns to have one of their leaders appointed as chief minister and it will be more propitious because they celebrate the harvest festival, Tadau Kaamatan on May 31 every year.

The question remains, who will be the new chief minister? -- BERNAMA
JS HAR rn