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BN retains power in Sabah (HL)

KOTA KINABALU, Sat. - The Barisan Nasional was returned to power in Sabah today, just one seat short of a two-thirds majority.

It won 31 of the 48 seats contested. Under the State Constitution, the winning party can appoint six members to the State Legislative Assembly.

The BN won a simple majority at 10.35pm when Datuk Aklee Abbas, from Umno, won the Sukau seat.

BN's arch-rival, Parti Bersatu Sabah, led by Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan, won 17 seats.

Former Chief Minister Datuk Harris Salleh's Bersekutu party failed to make any impact despite fielding candidates in all 48 constituencies.

Pas was totally rejected while Setia, Pasok and 27 independents performed miserably, and in many instances, lost their deposits.

BN's victory is seen as an endorsement for the ruling coalition which formed the previous administration after the 1994 polls following cross-overs by 22 PBS candidates. But tonight's victory had a price.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, who said last week that he would quit politics if he lost, was defeated in Moyog by Datuk Clarence Bongkos Malakun of the PBS.

Contesting in a Kadazandusun stronghold, Dompok, the incumbent and president of Parti Demokratik Sabah, secured 6,492 votes while Malakun polled 10,870 votes.

BN's other casualties were Deputy Chief Minister and Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah president Datuk Seri Joseph Kurup who failed to unseat incumbent Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan in the PBS stronghold of Bingkor.

State Culture, Environment and Tourism Minister Datuk Wilfred Bumburing lost to Edward Linggu Bukut of the PBS who polled 6,125 votes. Bumburing garnered 3,939 votes.

Harris was soundly beaten at Likas by Datuk Yong Teck Lee of the BN, himself a former Chief Minister.

Yong trounced Harris by 4,962 votes to retain the seat which he won by 2,180 votes in the last election.

Harris' defeat is seen as the end of his attempt to return to the political limelight, and also means a short lifespan for Bersekutu.

Yong polled 9,110 votes, PBS's Chong Eng Leong 4,148 and Harris 3,576.

The other three candidates were Yahaya Kassim of Pas, Gamparan Lajah of Setia and Saudin Kadis.

Pairin, the most prominent opposition member, won easily in his Tambunan stronghold, beating Petrus Gurinting of the BN.

The victory means that Pairin is the first Assemblyman in Sabah to have won for a record eighth time.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in a televised Press conference tonight, congratulated all BN winners and thanked the voters for their continued support of the coalition.

Dr Mahathir said BN's victory was an indication that the people of Sabah voted for continued development and security.

He said although the BN had lost in several areas where the Kadazandusun community formed the majority, PBS's victories in them was on a smaller majority.

"I see a changing perception among the Kadazandusun community.

"There is a growing trend that the BN is being accepted by more and more people in these areas," he said.

Dr Mahathir expressed regret that Dompok had lost, saying the BN wanted him to continue to be Chief Minister.

When asked who would be the next Kadazandusun Chief Minister in Sabah, Dr Mahathir said:

"We will have to study it very carefully, taking into consideration the results and the support given to Dompok and all the other BN candidates."

Dr Mahathir gave the assurance that the rotation system would remain.

In Api-Api, a constituency in Kota Kinabalu, MCA's sole candidate Datuk Chau Tet On was defeated by Dr Yee Moh Chai of PBS by a 3,183-vote majority.