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Sabah-Chong

CHONG KAH KIAT RETURNS TO STATE POLITICS, TO CONTEST KUDAT SEAT

KOTA KINABALU, Feb 25 (Bernama) -- Senator Datuk Chong Kah Kiat today announced his resignation as Minister in the Prime Minister's Department to return to state politics and contest the Kudat state seat in the March 12-13 Sabah election.

Chong, who is president of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), told reporters on his return from Kuala Lumpur that he submitted his letter of resignation to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday.

"He respected my decision to resign which takes effect on Monday (March 1)," said Chong, who is a former assemblyman of Kudat.

The Chinese-based LDP is one of the nine components of the Sabah Barisan Nasional (BN).

Chong said he need not resign as minister to contest a state seat under the Federal and State Constitutions but decided to do so to prove that he was back in Sabah to fully serve the people, especially those in Kudat.

Asked about talks that his return came with an intention to become the chief minister under the rotation system, Chong said: "I don't intend to become the chief minister ... my return is to ensure the BN wins and continues to rule the state for the good of the people."

Under the rotation system introduced in the state by the BN, the Chinese community, numbering about 313,300, has had its turn in Datuk Yong Teck Lee who served as chief minister for two years.

The Muslim Bumiputeras also have had their turn, and the present chief minister now is Tan Sri Bernard Dompok representing the non-Muslim Bumiputeras.

Dr Mahathir has said the rotation system, which the BN sees as an in-built political mechanism to stabilise politics and maintain harmony through power-sharing, would be continued after the election.

On the allocation of seats among BN components for the 48-seat State Legislative Assembly, Chong said Sabah BN Chairman and Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok would announce it when it had been finalised.

Asked on the number of seats the LDP had been allocated, he said it was up to the chief minister.

Chong is expected to face his former political foe in the LDP, Datuk Kong Hong Ming, in the contest for Kudat.

Chong, who once served as assistant minister in the Chief Minister's Department when Datuk Harris Salleh was chief minister from 1976 to April 1985, said the most important thing now was team work among the BN leaders and members.

Harris, the former Berjaya president, is now the leader of Bersekutu, one of the opposition challengers to the BN. The other challenge to the BN rule is coming from the Kadazandusun-based Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) led by another former chief minister, Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan.

The LDP is one of the parties competing for support from among the 142,801 Chinese in the State who have voting rights.

The other Chinese parties are the Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) led by Yong, and the peninsular-based MCA and Gerakan.

Kudat is a mixed constituency by race while there are seven Chinese constituencies - Api Api, Elopura, Karamunting, Tanjung Papat, Sri Tanjung, Sembulan and Inanam.

In the 1995 general election, Chong was defeated in the Marudu parliamentary seat by Datuk Amir Kahar Tun Mustapha who stood on a PBS

ticket. Amir Kahar is now in Umno.

Chong, who was appointed a senator and made a federal minister in June 1995, said he would remain as senator.

"There is no legal requirement to resign as a member of either houses of Parliament (Dewan Rakyat and Dewan Negara)," he said.

Chong said he thanked the prime minister for respecting his decision and for allowing him to serve as as federal minister and that in return, Dr Mahathir wished him "luck".

On his chances in Kudat, he said he believed the people would support the BN. "I am very confident I will do well in Kudat and the people will return the BN," he said.

On how the Chinese would vote, Chong said he believed that the community would by and large realise the importance of political stability and that they also would appreciate the BN Government.

"They saw for themselves the significance of a good BN government and that it is vital to have good state-federal relations," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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