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Mahathir-Sabah (Ranau)

DR M CALLS OFF RANAU VISIT BUT GETS MESSAGE ACROSS

RANAU, March 11 (Bernama) -- Because of bad weather, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called off his visit to this foothill town but managed to get his speech across from Kota Kinabalu to thousands of waiting Barisan Nasional (BN) supporters, thanks to RTM.

The prime minister, on an election campaign trail for BN candidates, was scheduled to fly by helicopter into this town near Mount Kinabalu but had to cancel the trip after a similar visit to Kudat in northern Sabah due to poor visibility.

Instead, he flew direct to Kota Kinabalu where RTM engineers hurriedly arranged for the prime minister to address the crowd by telephone from the airport VIP room.

His telephone address was then relayed through loud speakers to the crowd here. His 20-minute speech was also aired over Radio Sabah.

Originally, the prime minister's speech here was to be televised live by RTM's TV 1.

An RTM official said this was the first time the station had arranged for such a broadcast for the prime minister.

At a press conference later before leaving for Kuala Lumpur, Dr Mahathir commended RTM for the effort.

Dr Mahathir began his speech by apologising to the people of Ranau for not being able to come here.

He said he hoped to be with them after the election.

" I wanted to go to Ranau to explain the BN's stand and the need for the Sabah people to elect the BN in this election. Because I'm unable to come, I requested to speak over the telephone and I hope my speech can be heard clearly by the crowd gathered in Ranau," he said.

In his speech, the prime minister stressed on the importance for Sabahans to ensure the BN returned to power again in Sabah.

" I assure you the elected BN representatives will be of help to the people of Sabah not only in Ranau but also in other areas in the state," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Sabahans cannot rely on the opposition to administer the state as not only they had limited capacity, they were also not serious to bring development to Sabah.

" There are people who say what's the use of development, schools or education if Sabah was not ruled by Sabahans...Sabah will definitely be headed by Sabahans in the State BN and we can bring development to the state," he said.

Instead, the prime minister said, the PBS felt that Sabahans would be satisfied if the party came to power although the people would be left out from the mainstream of development.

" This is PBS' very narrow view to fulfil its selfish interests and to victimise the people, there will be no development and other facilities because PBS and (Datuk Joseph) Pairin (Kitingan) wants to rule," he said.

Dr Mahathir emphasised that the federal government actually gave good treatment to Sabah better than to some of the other states.

Refuting PBS' accusations that there were insufficient number of Sabah ministers in the federal cabinet, he said, there were two ministers from the state while there was none from some states despite contributing to the country's development.

They are Land and Cooperative Development Minister Tan Sri Kasitah

Gaddam and Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, who resigned as Minister in the Prime Minister's Department to contest in the state polls.

Dr Mahathir assured Sabahans that he would appoint another leader from Sabah to be a federal minister.

He also said the federal government channelled substantial allocation to rebuild the state and to repair the "damages" done by the PBS under its nine-year rule from 1985 to 1994.

Since the BN took over the helm of the state government in 1994, the state administration functioned smoothly with the cordial state-federal ties despite the chief ministers' rotation every two years among the three major ethnic groups in the state.

He said it would be difficult for the federal government to cooperate with a chief minister who did not have good rapport with federal leaders like from the PBS, the main opposition party in Sabah.

Before hanging up the telephone receiver, Dr Mahathir appealed to Sabahans to vote for the "dacing" symbol when they go to the polls tomorrow and on Saturday to enjoy continued development and prosperity.

-- BERNAMA

JS TS