

17 FEB 1999

Sabah-Mahathir

DR MAHATHIR VISITING PBS' FORTRESS - KENINGAU

KOTA KINABALU, Feb 17 (Bernama) -- One of the areas to be visited by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during his three-day working visit to Sabah beginning tomorrow is Keningau district, the power base of Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), the main opposition party in the state.

Political observers in Sabah view the visit on Friday as a follow-up to the vigorous efforts being carried out by the Barisan Nasional (BN) election machinery to wrest the seat in the soon-to-be held ninth state election.

The Keningau parliamentary constituency which has three state seats -- Tambunan, Bingkor and Pensiangan, is the fortress of PBS president Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan.

Besides being the MP for Keningau, Pairin is also the assemblyman for Tambunan, the birthplace of PBS. His younger brother Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan is Bingkor assemblyman while the assemblyman for Pensiangan (formerly Nabawan) Datuk Adib Sigoh, who is now deputy president of Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS), a BN component, won the seat on a PBS ticket in the last state election in 1994.

Pairin had never lost in Tambunan since the state election in 1985, the year PBS was conceived, while Jeffrey was elected as Bingkor assemblyman in the last election.

According to observers, the BN is gaining acceptance among the Keningau electorate and should step up efforts to enhance its position, and Dr Mahathir's presence on Friday would surely be a morale booster to the BN election machinery to convince the voters to support the BN candidates in the polls.

While in Keningau, Dr Mahathir will attend a leader-with-the-people gathering at the Keningau community hall, open an exhibition and Sabah Foundation's tamu (farmers' market) outside the hall and lay the foundation stone for Taman Keningau.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president and BN chairman, will kick off his visit to Sabah by attending a kongsi raya function in conjunction with Hari Raya Aidilfitri and Chinese New Year festivities in Sandakan on Thursday morning.

This will be followed by the opening of yet another basic infrastructure facility keenly-awaited by the people of Sabah -- the 60 Megawatt Libaran Power Station, an Independent Power Plant (IPP), developed by Stratavest Sdn Bhd at Jalan Labuk, Sandakan.

After the opening, Dr Mahathir will return here to launch the Indigenous People's Affairs Council at the Penampang Cultural Centre and attend another Kongsi Raya function at the Kota Kinabalu Sports Complex.

On his return here from Keningau on Friday, Dr Mahathir will meet academicians and students of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) in Likas Bay.

On the third day, he will meet Sabah BN Wanita members and leaders at a leading hotel here followed by a closed-door meeting with those involved in the state's tourism industry to discuss a memorandum prepared by the state government on air links between Sabah and the outside world.

Before returning to Kuala Lumpur on Saturday evening, Dr Mahathir will hold a media conference at a leading hotel, here.

-- BERNAMA

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