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Mahathir-Sabah (Resources)

EXPLOITATION OF SABAH'S RESOURCES WON'T HAPPEN AGAIN - MAHATHIR

KOTA KINABALU, Feb 20 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today gave an assurance that the federal government will ensure the exploitation of Sabah's natural resources for personal gains will not recur.

He said the government would assign a body to extract the state's resources and use the proceeds for the benefit of Sabahans.

"This is different from before... then tall trees (timber) were felled for timber but we don't know where the money went," he told a press conference at the end of his three-day visit to Sabah.

Dr Mahathir said among the reasons for the high level of poverty in Sabah was shortage of allocations, and no effort was made in the past to tackle the problem.

"Sabah was very rich at one time but no attention was given for the progress of Sabahans because everyone was busy amassing wealth for themselves," he said.

The prime minister said the federal government was serious in its efforts to eradicate poverty in Sabah now that it assumed a greater role in the state's development.

"We are able to cooperate with the present state government to develop the state and resolve problems like poverty," he said.

On the Barisan Nasional (BN) manifesto for the coming state election, he said: "We will emphasise on a government that's capable and interested to develop Sabah, and a state government that can cooperate with the federal government."

The BN would also stress its seriousness in sticking to pledges to develop Sabah, he said.

"For instance we promised that when BN comes to power we will set up a university. We have done that and have so far spent RM800 million for Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). This shows we are serious with our pledges especially when it concerns training for Sabahans," he said.

Asked when the Sabah Legislative assembly would be dissolved, Dr Mahathir merely said that it could take place any time but not after April.

On his closed-door meeting with tourism operators earlier today, the prime minister said he was briefed on various aspects of the industry in the state.

This included frequency of air flights from certain destinations to Sabah and chartered flights in the state.

"I find that those who gave the briefing have an in-depth knowledge about tourism in Sabah and I have taken note of the matters raised by them," he said.

The matters would be referred to the National Economic Action Council, he added.

Dr Mahathir and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali who arrived in Sabah on Thursday returned to Kuala Lumpur today.

Present at the airport to send him off were Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam, state ministers and leaders of Sabah BN component parties.

-- BERNAMA

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