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Federal minister seeks return to Sabah politics

KOTA KINABALU, Sun. - Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Senator Datuk Chong Kah Kiat has confirmed he is seeking a return to Sabah politics after serving four years in the Federal Government.

Chong, one of Sabah's well-known Chinese political leaders, is president of the Liberal Democratic Party, one of nine Sabah Barisan Nasional component parties.

"I intend to come back to State politics," he said yesterday after attending a working breakfast with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at Shangri-La Tanjung Aru Resort, here.

He was asked to confirm his statement recently that he would contest the coming Sabah elections.

"Yes, I am coming back if the Prime Minister gives the green light to my request to return. I intend to contest in Kudat."

Chong did not contest in the 1994 State elections, fielding instead Datuk Kong Hong Ming, then his deputy, in Kudat.

Kong won the seat and was later made Social Services Minister.

He left the LDP when he was unsuccessful in his bid to unseat Chong for the party's president post and joined Gerakan.

Kong was subsequently sacked from Gerakan and lost his Cabinet post when he opposed amendments tabled in the State Legislative Assembly to curb the powers of the Chief Minister. Kong is now with Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS).

It is now apparent that Chong will face Kong in Kudat in the coming election.

Chong is no stranger to the people of Kudat being their Assemblyman from 1976 to 1985. He was also Assistant Minister to the Chief Minister under the Berjaya government.

Asked if given the chance, would he be interested in being Sabah's Chief Minister, Chong said:

"I am not that interested. What I am very interested in is to see the Barisan Nasional returned to power. That is my hope."

Under the BN power-sharing system, leaders of the Muslim Bumiputera, non-Muslim Bumiputera and Chinese rotate to be Chief Minister for a two-year term.

Presently, the non-Muslim Bumiputera's two-year term as Chief Minister expires in May, 2000.

The next Chief Minister will be a leader from the Muslim Bumiputera and then be followed by a Chinese.

Asked how many seats LDP hoped to contest, he said: "Not many."

In terms of Chinese majority areas, he said there were eight to 10 seats to be divided among the LDP, MCA and Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP).

He said the LDP, MCA and SAPP reached a consensus to leave it to the Prime Minister to decide.

Former Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee, who is now Minister in the Chief Minister's Office, heads SAPP while MCA is headed by Api Api Assemblyman Datuk Chau Tet On.

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