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Kadazandusun and Murut honour PM as `premier son`

KENINGAU, Fri. - In a special honour given to favourite sons, the Kadazandusuns and Muruts of Sabah's Interior Division have adopted Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as "premier son".

The division comprises the districts of Tambunan, Keningau, Tenom, Nabawan and Pensiangan.

In honour of the Prime Minister, a park dedicated to him will also be built in Keningau aptly named Taman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir.

Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Kurup made the announcements during a leader-with-the people session.

"We hope that you (Dr Mahathir) will accept and acknowledge our offers," Kurup, the Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS) president, said. "This is our way and tradition to say thank you to a country's respected leader."

Responding to the dedications, Dr Mahathir said: "I acknowledge now I am one of you."

Dr Mahathir, who is on the second day of his state visit to Sabah, had journeyed to this heartland of Kadazandusuns and Muruts.

He produced a pantun and charmed a boisterous audience at the Keningau Sports Complex multi-purpose hall when he said: "You are my family."

Referring to "adik kakak" (brothers and sisters), Dr Mahathir said to loud applause that although far away and unable to be in Keningau often, "you will not be far from my thoughts".

Kurup had conveyed the pantun to Dr Mahathir who admitted to not being adept at penning such verses.

However, he obliged with a reply "written by my friend" with an epilogue that had the words "in this country, we are all family".

In between the pantun exchange, the Barisan Nasional chairman did not forget the primary purpose of his visit to Sabah: he read a line which roughly meant "family members should vote for each other".

"Do not forget to vote for Barisan Nasional," he said, referring to the imminent State elections.

Dr Mahathir recalled he first went to Keningau in 1965 with then Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak.

"While here, I witnessed the reviving of the oath of loyalty to Malaysia."

The oath-reading was led by Native Chief Alexander Kadam. The oath was first read by the late Datuk G.S. Sundang 36 years ago.

The Interior Division population, especially the Kadazandusun and Murut, had initially objected to Sabah being part of Malaysia but later agreed.

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