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Sabah-Harris

KL MUST ENSURE FUNDS FOR SABAH -- HARRIS

KOTA KINABALU, March 7 (Bernama) -- Bersekutu Acting president Datuk Harris Salleh said today it is incumbent upon the federal government to ensure there were sufficient funds to develop Sabah as the state is part of Malaysia.

The federal government cannot shirk its responsibility as it was stipulated in the Federal Constitution, the former chief minister told reporters after addressing party supporters at his residence in Likas, near here.

In this context, he said, it was unconstitutional for Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to say that it would be difficult for the federal government to carry out development projects in Sabah if the state was ruled by opposition parties.

During his three-day visit to Sabah which ended yesterday, the prime minister had said the BN-led federal government would not cooperate with political parties other than the state BN and that the formation of the next state government by opposition parties could retard development programmes planned for the state.

He said this when appealing to Sabahans to support the BN in the ninth state election, polling for which will be held on Friday and Saturday.

Harris also said the central government must comply with the constitutional requirements to contribute enough funds to the state to enable the government of the day to implement infrastructure projects, provide education and health facilities as well as create socio-economic activities for the people.

He claimed that since 1964, the federal government owed Sabah government between RM5 and RM10 billion or 40 per cent of the excess revenue or tax collected from the state.

In this regard, he said, Bersekutu was studying the legal aspects to claim the arrears if the party formed the next state government.

Under Schedule 10 of Section 2 (1) of the Federal Constitution, Sabah is eligible to receive 40 per cent of the excess revenue collected by the federal government from the state in the form of special financial aid, he claimed.

On the backwardness of Sabahans, he claimed that under his tenure as chief minister from 1976 to 1985, Sabah emerged as the second most developed state in Malaysia after Selangor but it regressed only to be behind Kelantan under Parti Bersatu Sabah and BN administrations.

" Everything has gone down in Sabah in the last 14 years, deteriorating very fast like cancer... before that Sabah was praised by the foreign media and local leaders," he said.

Responding to Dr Mahathir's comment that he (Harris) was a difficult man to deal with, he said, " it becomes difficult when it involves the interests of the state and the people."

" To me, there is no compromise when it comes to the rights of the state and the people.

" Nevertheless, I've nothing personal against the prime minister and I hope he has nothing personal against me, I'm only fighting for Sabah and for Sabahans," he added.

On claims by certain groups that Bersekutu had actually formed a pact with the BN in this election, Harris said his party had its own objectives and would not cooperate with any party including PBS and BN.

-- BERNAMA
RAR/AM TS