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Mahathir-Keningau

MAHATHIR PROMISES RAPID DEVELOPMENT FOR KENINGAU

KENINGAU, Feb 19 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today promised to give attention for the development of Keningau, an interior district in Sabah, to speed up the development of such areas in the state.

"Although I come from Alor Setar, the attention I give to Alor Setar is not more than what I will give to Keningau," he said to a loud applause from thousands of people from various communities who accorded him a tumultuous welcome on his arrival here.

"I promise to give full attention to Keningau," he said, adding that he would return here to see for himself the progress of the district.

Dr Mahathir made the promise after he was earlier accorded the honorary title "Son of Keningau" by Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Kurup, who is tipped to be the Barisan Nasional (BN) candidate for Bingkor, one of the three state seats in the Keningau parliamentary constituency.

Dr Mahathir told the crowd that he first visited Keningau in 1965 with the then Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak.

At that time, Keningau was a town with a small population, and was inaccessible by road and devoid of basic amenities, he said.

But today Keningau could take pride with the rapid development in the area as in other rural areas although much more needed to be done to uplift the socio-economic conditions of the people living in the interior, he said.

Dr Mahathir said Sabah had the potential to be the country's richest state if the people returned the ruling BN government to power in the upcoming state election.

He, however, said the people must have the ability and expertise to exploit the abundant natural resources in the state.

Dr Mahathir said Sabah was endowed with rich resources including gold found at the copper mine in Mamut.

"That's why the federal government had set up a university in Sabah to upgrade the knowledge of the locals to enable them to develop their state," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Sabah's gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 2.5 per cent last year, and which is forecast to rise to 3.5 per cent this year, showed that the state was experiencing a higher growth compared to the national economy which recorded a contraction.

He was confident that the state would continue to post positive economic growth provided that the BN remained in power.

The prime minister, who is on the second day of his three-day visit to Sabah, said he felt proud by the presence of more than 5,000 people to welcome him upon his arrival here by helicopter from Kota Kinabalu.

This was a good sign for the BN in the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) stronghold, he said.

Kurup is expected to face Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan of the PBS in Bingkor, which along Tambunan and Pensiangan (formerly known as Nabawan) form the Keningau parliamentary constituency.

PBS president Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan, who is Dr Jeffrey's elder brother, is the assemblyman for Tambunan and member of parliament for Keningau.

Dr Mahathir said the federal government had provided a lot of assistance to the Sabah government although the state was rich with timber

revenue before.

"Sabah had vast tracts of timber but state governments before the BN government had used up the state's resources," he said.

He reiterated that the federal government had no intention to seize the rights of Sabah and its people as alleged by opposition parties.

If indeed it had such an intention, the federal government could have ruled Sabah from Kuala Lumpur by appointing a Yang dipertua Negeri, said Dr Mahathir.

"But this did not happen," he said.

All key posts in the state including that of the Yang dipertua Negeri, chief minister, state ministers and assemblymen are held by Sabahans.

They have the power to rule Sabah by taking into account the rights and interest of Sabahans, he said.

-- BERNAMA

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