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New CM seeks PM's views on Cabinet line-up

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Sabah's new Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam today called on Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and sought the Prime Minister's views on the proposed line-up of the State Cabinet, among other things.

When approached after the hour-long meeting at the Prime Minister's Department, Osu said: "We discussed State administrative issues and I sought his advice and views."

Osu said Dr Mahathir had left it to him to decide the matter of the State Cabinet line-up.

On Saturday, the State Cabinet line-up will be announced and the Ministers sworn in.

Osu, who took the oath of office as Sabah Chief Minister on Monday, said the State Cabinet line-up had not been finalised.

Osu succeeded Tan Sri Bernard Dompok who failed to retain the Moyog seat in last weekend's State election.

On speculation of Dompok's appointment to the Senate, Osu said the matter was at the discretion of the Prime Minister.

"But we'll make the most of the experience of Sabah leaders for the good and future of the Sabah people and the BN Government in Sabah.

"(Dompok's) appointment is secondary. What's important is that they (Dompok and other unelected leaders) are willing to lend their experience in the interest of the BN."

Osu said he would spell out his plans for Sabah after the first State Cabinet meeting next week.

However, he said, priority would be given to eradicating poverty in Sabah as the State was among those still with a sizeable number of poor population.

"The second focus will be on rural development. Being a physically large State, the question of its development must be tackled so that racial sentiments will not be harped upon again in the coming general election," he said.

Osu was also asked on Parti Bersatu Sabah president Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan's claim that phantom voters had helped some BN candidates win in the recent State polls.

Osu replied: "All sorts of excuses crop up once you lose."

Earlier, in Kota Kinabalu, Osu officially assumed his official duties from Dompok with a pledge to work hard to fulfil the BN's election promises.

He said the thrust of the State BN administration under his leadership would be hastening economic development and poverty eradication.

The brief handing-over ceremony was witnessed by State Secretary Tan Sri Khalil Datu Jamalul and Chief Minister's Department Cabinet and Policy Division director Awang Samat.

Osu, 50, will be Chief Minister for two years after which he will hand over the post to a non-Muslim Bumiputera who will complete Dompok's 14 months uncompleted term.

Dompok was unable to complete his term under the rotation system after losing his Moyog seat to PBS' Datuk Clarence Bongkos Malakun.

Dismissing the contention that the delay in the formation of the new Cabinet was due to internal problems or disagreements among BN component parties, Osu said: "There is no problem ... it's just that we needed more time."

Asked if all nine State BN component parties will be represented in the new State Government, Osu said the BN had always been fair to all communities in Sabah.

On a report in a local daily that the 17 PBS Assemblymen were thinking of joining the BN, he said as far as he was concerned, the question did not arise.

Meanwhile, Dompok said he had met Dr Mahathir yesterday to brief the latter on what he had implemented during his 10 months as Chief Minister and to present his views on the formation of the new State Government.

He said it was crucial for the new State Government to ensure that the interests of Sabah's various communities were looked after.

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