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New Sabah CM to be known today (HL)

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KOTA KINABALU, Sun. - The big question of who will be sworn in as Sabah Chief Minister at 2.30pm tomorrow remained unanswered tonight. Key Barisan Nasional leaders involved in the decision-making went into a huddle for a series of talks today.

The defeat of Barisan Nasional's key Kadazandusun leaders, especially stalwarts like Parti Demokratik Sabah president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah president Datuk Seri Joseph Kurup and PDS deputy president Datuk Wilfred Bumburing, is making the selection difficult.

But the rotation system for the Chief Minister's post stands and the new leader, as stipulated by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, must be a Kadazandusun.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi confirmed the swearing-in for tomorrow but did not venture into details.

"Dompok will meet State BN leaders," Abdullah told reporters after meeting Dompok and Sabah Umno chief Datuk Osu Sukam at a hotel. "Then we will determine who will become the Chief Minister ... by tomorrow, the matter will be settled."

Declining to say if the next Chief Minister would represent the Kadazandusuns, Abdullah said: "I do not want to add to speculation."

He later called on the Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Sakaran Dandai at the Istana before leaving for Kuala Lumpur with Osu who will return to Kota Kinabalu tomorrow morning.

In between the talks, Dompok, who lost his Moyog seat to Parti Bersatu Sabah's Datuk Clarence Bongkos Malakun, met Sakaran with Osu.

If it is decided to appoint someone from Dompok's Parti Demokratik Sabah, then the front-runner is secretary-general Datuk Wences Anggang, 52, a PBS vice-president before he left to form PDS with Dompok following the 1994 polls.

Asked whether he was prepared to be Chief Minister, Anggang, who won in the Muslim-majority constituency of Kuala Penyu, said: "I cannot say ... it is up to the Barisan leaders. If (the post) is given to the PDS, our supreme council will decide."

The only other PDS winner among the 12 who contested is information chief Datuk Siringan Gubat, who won in Ranau.

The other non-Muslim Bumiputera candidate who won in the polls is Rubin Balang of Umno, who captured the Kemabong seat.

The defeat of the three stalwarts and exclusion of Datuk Pandikar Amin Mulia and Datuk Dayang Mahani Tun Pengiran Ahmad Raffae from contesting also mean the State Cabinet line-up will have to be drastically changed.

Sources said five Cabinet posts would be given to Muslim Bumiputeras, three to non-Muslim Bumiputeras and three to the Chinese.

Osu is expected to continue as Deputy Chief Minister. Two serving Ministers, Datuk Yahya Hussein and Datuk Lajim Ukin, are also expected to be retained.

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