

20/02/1999

`No Federal interference in Sabah Government'

Joseph Bingkasan; Rashid Yusof

KENINGAU, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad assured the people of Sabah that the Federal Government will not interfere in the formation of the next State Government.

Refuting the opposition's allegations of Federal intervention, Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan Nasional chairman, said the State Government had always and would continue to be managed by Sabah's leaders.

Addressing a meet-the-people gathering today, the Prime Minister said this was in line with the democratic practice.

"The State Government comprises BN component parties," he said, "and the Federal Government will always come to give assistance."

However, Dr Mahathir said it would be difficult for the Federal Government to assist the State Government if it was "confrontational".

The Federal Government would do its best to help make Sabah, being a resource-rich state, the richest in the country, he said.

"But first the people must elect a State Government that enjoys a cordial working relationship with the Federal Government."

The Prime Minister highlighted the need for hard work in developing Sabah.

Citing an example, he said there might be gold deposits in Mamut (Ranau) and efforts must be made to prospect for it.

"Otherwise, there would not be any benefits."

Dr Mahathir said despite being hit by the economic slowdown, the various measures taken by the Government had allowed the country to recover.

Noting that Sabah's economy grew last year at 2.8 per cent, higher than the country's overall economic growth, he said the State should maintain, if not improve, its performance this year.

Later, when addressing the academic staff and students of Universiti Malaysia Sabah, the Prime Minister spelt out two key criteria to put Malaysia on the right track to achieve Vision 2020.

The criteria are: devote time and energy to acquire knowledge and identify correct values to be incorporated into the people's culture.

"This is particularly true for university students."

The university in Likas, overlooking the South China Sea, is now partially completed. It was an election promise by the Prime Minister who told voters in Beaufort on Jan 31, 1994, that Sabah would get a university if the BN was voted to power.

The Prime Minister advised students not to waste the facilities and assistance, saying that people who wasted and did not value things would not succeed.

"As evident by experience of others around the world," he said, "ethnicity would not determine whether one would succeed."

Meanwhile, Bernama reports that Dr Mahathir tonight held a meeting with Sabah Umno leaders in Tanjung Aru.

Present at the hour-long closed-door meeting were Sabah Umno liaison chief Datuk Osu Sukam, who is also Sabah Deputy Chief Minister, as well as Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who is also Education Minister, and Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob.

(END)