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Osu's appointment not against spirit of Sabah rotation system

Joseph Bingkasan

THE results and subsequent turn of events of past Sabah elections have always been unpredictable and the just concluded ninth polls was no exception.

Having served as Chief Minister for nearly 10 months out of the two-year term given to him under the rotation system, Sabah Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman Tan Sri Bernard Dompok was expected to continue at the helm of the State Government.

During the campaign period, the Kadazandusuns, particularly those in Moyog, had been urged to ensure victory for him to continue as Chief Minister.

Sabah Umno head Datuk Osu Sukam had also put across this message to the Kadazandusuns when he had stated that a vote for Dompok meant the Kadazandusuns want their leader to be Chief Minister.

The Parti Demokratik Sabah (PDS) president was, however, unceremoniously defeated by political arch rival Datuk Clarence Bongkos Malakun of Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS).

The final tally of the election results bared it all. PDS only won two of the 12 seats it was allocated, a sharp contrast to Umno which swept all the 24 seats contested.

The post should have gone to another Kadazandusun (non-Muslim Bumiputera) leader but Sabah Umno head Datuk Osu Sukam was appointed Chief Minister.

It is understood that soon after the results were known, Dompok held a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Osu on the appointment of a new Chief Minister.

This decision was subsequently conveyed to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Accepting defeat, Dompok said the results showed that PDS could no longer lead the State Government.

"I, therefore, agreed with the decision made by the BN leadership that Osu head the State Government to give leaders from the Kadazandusun community some time to gain experience in administering the State," he said.

Yesterday, Dompok officially handed over the Chief Minister's duties to Osu.

The yet-to-be named Cabinet will be sworn in before the Yang di-Pertua Negeri on Saturday.

On Tuesday, Dompok returned from Kuala Lumpur where he met Dr Mahathir to brief him on what had been implemented during his 10-month term as Chief Minister.

Dompok said it was crucial for the new State Government to ensure that the interests of the various communities in Sabah were well looked after.

Abdullah said Sabah needed a credible, capable and strong BN Government to fulfil its election promises to bring more development to the State. The BN will also be facing a general election within a year's time.

There was no two ways about it - the choice of Osu was the most logical.

Osu's appointment was not against the spirit of the rotation system of the Chief Minister implemented since 1994.

A Kadazandusun leader will take over after Osu's two-year term expires in March 2001.

By then the Kadazandusun leader groomed to be Chief Minister would have

the required experience to head the State Government.

It is believed that the leader will be among the Ministers in Osu's Cabinet line-up.

Among the 31 newly-elected BN members of the Legislative Assembly, only three are non-Muslim Bumiputera.

They are Datuk Wences Angang (Kuala Penyu) and Datuk Siringan Gubat (Ranau) both from PDS, and Umno's Datuk Rubin Balang (Kemabong).

Dompok's defeat was a bitter pill to swallow but the Kadazandusun community should not be unduly alarmed.

Though having had rejected their own leaders in the BN, the Government will not punish them.

An assurance to this effect came from Abdullah who said that the BN would continue to bring development to the 17 constituencies won by the Parti Bersatu Sabah.

"This (State Government) is a Government for the people of Sabah," the Deputy Prime Minister said.

And true to the spirit of the BN power-sharing concept, Osu's appointment was welcomed and supported not only by Dompok but Datuk Joseph Kurup, another respected Kadazandusun leader.

Kurup, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRs) president, also defeated in the election, said it was not appropriate for the Kadazandusun community to question Osu's appointment.

He said this was because it was the Kadazandusuns who did not support their leaders in the election.

He was confident that Osu would pay equal attention to all communities in Sabah.

A Muslim Kadazandusun leader, Senator Datuk Kasitah Kadam, summarised Osu's appointment as most appropriate and timely.

"Osu's experience at the Federal and State levels, and his good relationship with Federal leaders, make him special as a Chief Minister to bring progress to Sabah," said Kasitah who is Federal Land and Co-operative Development Minister.

Osu said the BN election manifesto which, among others, emphasised hastening economic development and poverty eradication, would be the main thrust of the State BN administration under his leadership.

On Dompok's future, Osu said the PDS president would be given an important role under the BN administration although he lost in the election.

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