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Osu appointed Sabah Chief Minister

Zulkifli Othman; Kamarul Yunus

BARISAN Nasional (BN) yesterday picked Sabah Umno liaison chief Datuk Osu Sukam as Sabah Chief Minister and shut the door against possible cooperation with Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS).

Osu, with the weight of Umno winning all 24 seats it contested in the ninth state election, becomes chief minister following the defeat of Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, who was chief minister when the State Legislative Assembly was dissolved.

Under the rotation system, Bumiputera Muslim, Bumiputera non-Muslim and Chinese will hold the chief ministership for two years.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, speaking at a press conference to announce the appointment of Osu as the new Sabah Chief Minister yesterday, repeated that cooperation with the PBS was out of the question.

"There is no question of any talk with the PBS on cooperation," he said. Abdullah, however, assured the Kadazandusun that the rotation system will continue and the next chief minister after Osu would be a Kadazandusun.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday the appointment of Osu as chief minister will help strengthen Sabah BN in facing the coming general election.

"It is important that Umno lead the Sabah Government since BN needs a strong Government when facing the coming general election, scheduled to be held anytime from now until April next year, he told newsmen after meeting Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"(Based on the just-concluded Sabah election) Umno had received strong support and mandate from the Sabahans," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman, was asked whether the appointment of an Umno leader as Sabah Chief Minister for the first two-year term under the rotation basis will be a permanent feature when BN rules the state after every election.

"No, not necessary. Presently, we are weakened following Dompok's failure to retain his Moyok seat. If Dompok had won, he will be reappointed as chief minister. We need to have a strong Government (to face the next general election). Thus, the present choice would be from Umno," he said.

Reiterating that BN will continue to implement the rotation basis, Dr Mahathir said the decision was reached after consultation with all BN component leaders in Kota Kinabalu last Sunday.

He added that despite BN winning a bigger majority in the Sabah state election, it has no immediate plans to call for a snap general election.

"I am not affected by the results. I had expected BN to win in Sabah but only with a simple majority. However, we have done rather well and proved critics wrong but this does not mean that this has induced me to call for a snap election.

Dr Mahathir also said he is confident BN will win a two-thirds majority in the coming general election.

"We (BN) will win but it will be hard for us to better or maintain what we achieved during the 1995 elections. I also don't think the opposition will be able to form a government in the next election," he said.

Osu is expected to announce his Cabinet today. It is expected that Mr Wences Anggang, one of the two Parti Demokratik Rakyat winners in the

election, will be named deputy chief minister.
He won the Kuala Penyu seat. The other is Mr Siringan Guribat who won
the Ranau seat.

(END)