

16/03/1999

Osu is Sabah Chief Minister (HL)

KOTA KINABALU, Mon. - Sabah Umno head Datuk Osu Sukam was today sworn in as the State's 12th Chief Minister before Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Sakaran Dandai at the Istana.

Among those present were Kota Kinabalu High Court Judge Datuk Charles Ho, former Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok and State Secretary Tan Sri Khalil Jamalul.

Speaking to the Press before leaving the Istana, Osu said his immediate task would be the formation of the State Cabinet. "I will call a Press conference tomorrow," he said.

Asked if he would announce his Cabinet line-up tomorrow, the former Deputy Chief Minister said the list was being decided.

In Kuala Lumpur, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said a Kadazandusun leader from the Barisan Nasional would take over the Chief Minister's post after Osu had completed his term, followed by a leader representing the Chinese community.

Dr Mahathir said Dompok's defeat had created a problem. Had he won in Moyog, there was no question that Dompok would have been asked to continue leading the State as he already possessed the experience as Chief Minister.

Dr Mahathir said an Umno leader was selected as Chief Minister because of the importance of having a strong State Government in view of the general election which must be held before April 2000.

"The rotation system remains but we feel it is vital that Umno leads Sabah as it has received strong support ... capable of leading the State and implementing projects."

At a Press conference after meeting with Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski at the Prime Minister's Department, Dr Mahathir said the decision to appoint Osu had been agreed to by Sabah BN leaders.

Osu's appointment was earlier announced by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at a Press conference at the Sabah Umno headquarters in Komplek KWSP in Kota Kinabalu.

"After Osu completes his term, a Kadazandusun will take over to complete the 14 months which Dompok could not complete. The rotation will continue as usual," Abdullah said.

Dompok was appointed Chief Minister to represent the Kadazandusun community on May 28 last year, after the Muslim Bumiputera and Chinese communities had completed their two-year terms.

He lost his Moyog seat to Parti Bersatu Sabah's Clarence Bongkos Malakun in the State election.

On the discussions among Dr Mahathir, Osu and Dompok, Abdullah said the rotation system was emphasised.

He said the discussion had taken into consideration the need to create a credible and capable Government to ensure all BN pledges during the election could be implemented.

Asked if the defeat of Kadazandusun parties in the BN fold indicated the community had rejected them, he said it meant that not everyone accepted the parties.

Only two Parti Demokratik Sabah candidates - Datuk Wences Anggang (Kuala Penyu) and Datuk Siringan Gubat (Ranau) - won in the polls.

Another BN Kadazandusun-based party, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah headed by Datuk Seri Joseph Kurup, failed to win any seat.

"There is not enough support and I cannot say that Dompok was totally rejected by the Kadazandusun and the people, but in a democracy, this happens," Abdullah said.

He said the BN would continue its power-sharing concept and that the BN was a Government for the people of Sabah.

He added that the BN did not plan to discuss inviting the PBS into its fold.

Asked about non-Muslim candidates winning in Muslim Bumiputera constituencies, Abdullah said:

"Generally, Sabah politics has matured, but in any situation, there will be people who promote a political approach which may not be accepted by some groups.

"However, the important thing is the people of Sabah have elected the BN following the democratic process."

Dompok, when met at the same venue, said he supported the appointment of Osu as Chief Minister.

"I support the decision to appoint Osu to lead the Government, and then to allow a Kadazandusun to take over the helm of the Cabinet after he completes his term," he said.

The BN won 31 seats in the election - Umno took 24 seats; PDS, two; Sabah Progressive Party, three; and Liberal Democratic Party, two. PBS headed by Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan won 17 seats.

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