

15 MAR 1999

Sabah-Chief Minister

OSU NEW SABAH CM, ROTATION SYSTEM CONTINUES

KOTA KINABALU, March 15 (Bernama) -- Datuk Osu Sukam has been named the new Chief Minister of Sabah to head the freshly returned Barisan Nasional government.

His appointment was announced by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who said the rotation system of chief ministership in Sabah would be continued.

Osu, 50, the Sabah Umno chief, takes over from Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, who was defeated in the ninth state polls over the weekend.

He is scheduled to take his oath of office before Yang Dipertua Negeri Tun Sakaran Dandai at Istana Negeri here at 3.30pm today.

Speaking at a news conference at the Umno office here shortly upon his arrival from Kuala Lumpur, Abdullah said the appointment was decided at a meeting he had with outgoing Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, who is state BN chief, and Osu just after the outcome of state election was known early Sunday morning. BN coordinator for the state election, Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, who is Pahang Menteri Besar, was also present at the meeting.

He said the decision was then conveyed to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday in Kuala Lumpur, who concurred with it.

Osu, who won the Kawang seat in the election by increasing his majority to 2,213 votes from only 64 votes in the 1994 polls, was Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister in the previous state government headed by Dompok.

The announcement of Osu to head the new state government was greeted with loud applause by all the 24 newly-elected Umno state assemblymen, including Osu, who were present at the press conference. Also present were Dompok and Khalil.

Abdullah also announced that Osu would serve his term under the rotation system and would be succeeded by a leader of the Kadazandusun community in the Sabah BN and then from the Chinese community during the five-year term of government.

"I wish to explain here that throughout the meeting, the principle of rotation was stressed that we will not budge and will continue with the rotation," he said.

He also said the Kadazandusun leader who succeeds Osu would continue Dompok's uncompleted term. Dompok had only served 10 months of his two-year term as Chief Minister when the state legislative assembly was dissolved on Feb 22 for the state election.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir himself had said before the polls that Dompok, who is president of Parti Demokratik Sabah (PDS), would continue to be the Chief Minister (if he and the BN won the election).

The BN captured 31 of the 48 seats in the assembly with the other 17 going to Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS).

"But after considering the election results as well as the situation after the polls and Dompok's defeat, BN must recognise that the outcome makes it necessary for certain changes to be made.

"Firstly, Bernard (Dompok) did not win in the election, something which the BN feels very sad about...and PDS did not receive much support as only two of its candidates won," he said.

PDS fielded 12 candidates in Kadazandusun-majority constituencies but only Datuk Wences Angang (in Kuala Penyu) and Datuk Siringan Gubat (Ranau) won.

Abdullah said everyone acknowledged the fact that Umno performed extremely well with 100 per cent of its candidates winning, while in the case of the other BN component parties "some won but others didn't".

"Under this circumstances, we took into cognizance the need for the BN to form a government that is credible, capable and strong to be able to fulfil promises made by the BN during this election," he said.

The promises were made to bring more development for Sabah and its people, he said.

In view of this, everyone in the meeting agreed that it would be better if PDS, which represents the Kadazansuns, made way for an Umno leader to be appointed as the Chief Minister, he said.

"This view is shared by Tan Sri Bernard (Dompok) himself who understands the situation in his party including with regard to the two winning PDS candidates," he said.

Stressing that the rotation system would continue, Abdullah said that after Osu, leaders representing the Kadazandusun and Chinese communities would have their turn to be appointed as the Chief Minister.

"No changes have been made to it (the system). I want to stress this because I want everyone to understand the decision made.

The Deputy Prime Minister said all sides appreciated Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's views on the appointment of the new Chief Minister.

They accepted the Prime Minister's intention to keep to the pledge that the rotation system would be retained.

"We just made slight changes (to the system) involving Umno and PDS. Otherwise it remains the same," he said.

Dompok told the press conference he was grateful to the BN leadership, particularly Dr Mahathir, for giving him the opportunity to head the state government "although for only nine months, due to the election results".

He said the results showed that the PDS could no longer lead the state government under the rotation system.

"I therefore agreed with the decision made by the BN leadership that Datuk Osu head the state government to give leaders from the Kadazandusun community some time to gain experience in administrating the state government.

Dompok congratulated Osu, who was his deputy before this, on Umno's big win in the polls and his appointment as Chief Minister.

Abdullah said Osu, who did not speak at the press conference, would meet reporters after the swearing-in ceremony.

Osu is Sabah's 11th Chief Minister and the sixth in the last five years alone following the rotation system introduced when the BN came to power in 1994.

After the 1994 polls, PBS president Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan was appointed Chief Minister for his fourth term but he resigned three weeks later when his party lost the majority in the 48-seat State Legislative Assembly following a spate of defections of PBS assemblymen to the BN.

When the PBS government crumbled, Pairin was replaced by Tun Sakaran Dandai of Umno (representing Muslim Bumiputeras), who relinquished the post eight months later on being appointed the Yang Dipertua Negeri.

Sabah then saw three more Chief Ministers -- Datuk Salleh Said Keruak, Datuk Yong Teck Lee (representing the Chinese community) and Dompok (non-Muslim Bumiputeras).

A British-trained lawyer, Osu was federal Minister of Land and Cooperative Development from 1994 to 1998.

Earlier he served as Deputy Minister of Works and Deputy Minister of Housing and Local Government.

Osu is married to Datin Noredah Majimpi and they have five children.

-- BERNAMA

AU SK