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Osu (Focus)

OSU: TIME TO FULFIL PEOPLE'S TRUST

By: Jackson Sawatan

KOTA KINABALU, June 24 (Bernama) -- Given a choice, Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam would prefer to focus on developing the state without being sidetracked by political issues.

After being given the mandate by the people in the recent Sabah state election, it is now time to fulfil the promises made.

Osu, who will complete his 100 days in office as Chief Minister tomorrow, said it is time to work and fulfil the trust the people placed in the Barisan Nasional (BN) in returning it to power in the state.

One hundred days is too short a time to see results and for Osu, it is more important to have laid the foundations in the state government's moves to eradicate poverty, stimulate economic growth, develop the infrastructure and strengthen the state's financial position.

"I have impressed upon the State Cabinet of our heavy responsibilities and that each one of us need to fulfil our responsibility," he said in an interview with the media here.

Osu, who grew up in a kampung in the Kawang area in Papar district, some 60km from here, understands the expectations of the people in the interior of Sabah.

More than a year ago when he joined the State Cabinet as Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister, Osu announced at a press conference that poverty eradication and development of rural areas were his priorities.

Now as head of the state government, Osu said, "reviving economic growth after being affected by the economic crisis is one of the main measures to overcome poverty".

To prepare Sabah for the new millennium, new fields such as information technology, science, food industry, entrepreneurship and consumer affairs are brought under the purview of State Ministries.

Still, Osu could not escape from having to face political realism.

The gaming outlets issue in Sabah, for example, suddenly turned political although it was initially a social one.

Osu was adept in tackling political issues too when he emphasised that "reducing the number of gaming premises and draws is a state government policy and we will see to it that it is implemented".

It is no minor challenge for Osu to lead a coalition of nine political parties in Sabah while at the same time having to parry "assaults" by the opposition and attend to other problems "inherited" since the state achieved independence through Malaysia in 1963.

The Chief Minister also has to contend with problems in the state such as a lack of infrastructure facilities and the presence of a high number of immigrants.

"Financially, we cannot do much as we do not have sizeable reserves and that is why we depend on the Federal government for assistance," he said.

The Federal government provided the state with a soft loan of RM230 million in April while an allocation of RM2.943 billion was approved for development projects in the state under the Seventh Malaysia Plan's mid-term review.

"I believe we would achieve encouraging results with all the steps that we have taken coupled with the close cooperation that we have with the Federal government," he said.

The rotation system of the Sabah Chief Minister's post indirectly hastened Osu's promotion.

Osu, representing Muslim bumiputeras under the rotation system, replaced Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, representing non-Muslim bumiputeras, who lost in Moyog in the recent state election although he still had more than a year to go of his term in the post.

Osu still has 18 months to go as Chief Minister and political observers said during this period, the question as to whether the system would be retained or otherwise, would be answered.

During this period too, Osu, as Sabah BN chairman, has the mission of winning Parliamentary seats in Sabah for the BN in the coming general election.

That mission has been outlined by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself after the BN won in the Sabah state election in March.

"Datuk Osu is appointed Chief Minister as the BN believes the state government should be led by Umno to face the upcoming general election," said Dr Mahathir.

Osu, the Sabah Umno liaison committee chairman, had proven his mettle by leading Umno to victory in all the 24 seats it contested in the recent Sabah state election.

In the 1995 general election, the BN won 12 out of the 20 Parliamentary seats in Sabah but this has now become 14 following the moves by Marudu MP Datuk Amirkahar Tun Mustapha in joining the BN two years ago and that of Penampang MP Paul Nointien recently.

"The BN is expected to have an easier path in Sabah in the coming general election based on results of the recent state election and this will be a plus point for Osu," said a political observer.

The BN's main foe in Sabah is the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS). PBS president Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan recently said he preferred to fight alone instead of joining forces with the opposition pact of PAS, Parti Keadilan Nasional, DAP and PRM.

Osu's message to the opposition fond of criticising every government decision is "step forward and present constructive ideas".

-- BERNAMA

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