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Policy of rotating CM's post will stay, says PM

Lokman Mansor

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says Barisan Nasional (BN) will maintain its policy of rotating the chief minister's post in Sabah for equal opportunity to the three major races in the state.

"We promised the people and we will keep our promise," he said, adding that the rotation of the chief ministers implemented after BN won the state elections in March 1994, has also received positive feedback.

"Of course, there was a little bit of unhappiness at first but in the end it has worked very well. Nobody can say it hasn't worked," said Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman.

Speaking to reporters at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport in Subang yesterday, the Prime Minister said when he visited the state immediately after BN took over, he found that its development was very backward akin to that of a least developed country.

"With the three groups being given an opportunity to lead the state, we found that positive changes have taken place in Sabah," he added. The leadership of the state is rotated among Muslim Bumiputeras, non-Muslim Bumiputeras, and the Chinese.

There have been four chief ministers in Sabah since BN took over. The first was Tan Sri Sakaran Dandai, who resigned when he was appointed Yang di-Pertua of the state. He was replaced by Datuk Salleh Tun Said.

Salleh was succeeded by Datuk Yong Teck Lee, and then the present Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok.

Asked about the use of anti-Federal sentiment by the Opposition parties in the state, Dr Mahathir said he is disappointed because this is not the way to become popular with the voters.

"We must be responsible. If we raise this anti-Federal sentiment and it becomes a political issue we might cause tension between the state and federal governments.

"In politics we must be responsible or else we will face problems. In some countries people riot because politicians are not responsible and raise issues that incite the people," he added.

Asked about talk that one of the major Opposition parties in the state will be accepted to rejoin BN, Dr Mahathir said this is not true.

"We cannot accept this Opposition party. Before we took them in, we found that they were only with us when it benefited them. We know their stand, that only one race has the right to rule Sabah. That is very narrow, whereas we give the opportunity to all races," he said.

Asked to comment on remarks by the Opposition parties in Sabah that they have 70 per cent of support in the state, Dr Mahathir said: "That is their claim, and they can claim whatever. We will win this election".

Bernama reports: Dr Mahathir will begin a three-day visit to Sabah on Thursday to assess the preparations made by the BN component parties to face the coming State elections.

The ninth state election is expected to be held anytime now with the current term of the State Legislative Assembly expiring on March 18.

The Prime Minister, who will be accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, will hold a "Kongsi Raya" reception at Sekolah Menengah Yu Yuan in Sandakan soon after his arrival.

He will then open the office of independent power producer, Stratavest Sdn Bhd, according to the itinerary of the visit released by the Sabah Information Department.

Dr Mahathir will travel to Kota Kinabalu in the afternoon to launch the Native Affairs Council before attending a Hari Raya-Chinese New Year dinner at the Likas Sports Complex.

He will travel by helicopter to Keningau in the interior of the state on Friday to meet the district's community leaders.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to return to Kota Kinabalu to meet students and academicians of Universiti Malaysia Sabah in Teluk Likas.

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