

25/08/2000

Rotation of CM's post a hot topic again as current term nears its end

Joniston Bangkuai

WITH about seven months remaining before Datuk Seri Osu Sukam ends his two-year term as Chief Minister, questions are being asked if the Barisan Nasional's unique system of rotating the post among the three main communities will continue. The rotation issue has always been a hot topic in Sabah, especially when the term of the current Chief Minister is ending.

Comments from political leaders on the issue were often highlighted by the local newspapers. It has also become a subject of coffeshop talk.

And when Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad made a two-day official visit to Sabah last month, Sabahans were eager to know what the Prime Minister had to say about the rotation.

"I think it is up to the people to decide. If they are comfortable with the rotation, it will continue but if they feel there should be a change, then it is up to them (the people) to make a decision," he said.

Dr Mahathir's statement has opened the floodgates for BN component parties in the State to make their stand on the issue.

State BN component parties have made differing statements about the rotation with some wanting it scrapped and some wanting it to continue.

The rotation, which was supposed to reflect the Barisan Nasional power sharing concept in Sabah, also appears to have become a "a bone of contention" among State BN component parties.

Under the system, Sabah's three main communities - the Muslim Bumiputera, non-Muslim Bumiputera and Chinese - take turns every two years to hold the coveted post.

The United Pasokmogun Kadazandusun-Murut Organisation (Upko) has boldly said that the rotation should be continued as it was a promise enshrined in the BN manifesto for the State election in March last year.

Upko also wants a leader from the party to take over from Osu when his two-year term ends in March next year.

"The next Chief Minister should rightly be from Upko because its president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok only held the post for 10 months when it was the non-Muslim Bumiputera's turn to hold the post in 1998," its secretary-general Datuk Wences Anggang said.

Dompok, who is now Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, was unable to complete his term when he failed to defend his Moyog seat in last year's State election.

In the election the only non-Muslim Bumiputera who won were Anggang (Kuala Penyu) and Datuk Siringan Gubat (Ranau) both from Upko and Datuk Rubin Balang (Kemabong) of Umno.

After the election it was decided that Osu be appointed to the post because none of the non-Muslim Bumiputera who won has the experience to shoulder the heavy responsibility as Chief Minister.

Political observers said Upko was staking a claim to the post as it felt threatened by another Kadazandusun-based party, the Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS), whose position has been strengthened with the defection of six opposition Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) Assemblymen to the party.

The six includes Bingkor Assemblyman Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan, a younger brother of PBS president Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan. Jeffrey is touted by PBRS as a potential Chief Minister.

An opposition Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) supreme council member who has been contemplating to join the PBRS claimed that Jeffrey was promised the

post by "someone higher up".

"He (Jeffrey) has been telling people that he is going to be the next Chief Minister and this has prompted many people, especially from the opposition parties, to join the PBRS," he said.

While Upko and PBRS appears to be engaged in a tussle for the Chief Minister's post, Sabah Umno, the dominant partner in the State BN, wants it scrapped.

The State Umno liaison committee at its meeting in Tawau last Sunday adopted a unanimous stand that the rotation should be abolished.

Sabah Umno will convey its decision to Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president and BN chairman, at an appropriate date.

Its Information Chief Senator Datuk Karim Ghani said Sabah Umno made its stand known following Dr Mahathir's statement that the rotation will continue unless the people of Sabah wants it scrapped.

He contended that although the rotation was promised in the BN manifesto, it was also stated in the manifesto that "what has been outlined could be reviewed if they did not benefit the people."

He claimed that Sabah Umno was against the rotation and so was the opposition PBS.

In the election Umno won 24 seats and PBS 17, and to Karim this amply demonstrated that the majority of Sabahans were against the rotation.

Although Karim's contention holds water, it has to be considered that while Umno is the dominant partner in the State BN, the voice of the minority parties is always taken into account under the BN concept.

(END)