

27 JUL 2000

Mahathir-Rotation

UP TO SABAHANS TO DECIDE ON ROTATION OF CM'S POST, SAYS PM

KOTA KINABALU, July 27 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the system of rotating the Chief Minister's post among the major communities in Sabah will continue if the people are comfortable with it.

"I think it is up to the Sabah people to decide. If they are comfortable with the system, yes it will continue. But if they feel there should be a change, it is up to them to decide," he told a news conference here today after opening the Sixth Congress of the United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Organisation (UPKO).

Asked what he thought of the system, the Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman said it had worked well so far.

The unique system was introduced by the BN in 1994 to enable leaders from the three main communities -- Muslim Bumiputeras, Chinese and non-Muslim Bumiputeras -- to become Chief Minister on a rotational basis for two years each.

Asked on claims by certain quarters that the system disrupted continuity in the state government's administration, Dr Mahathir said: "Continuity is there and those who had served as Chief Minister before also had no objections to serve (again) as a Cabinet member."

Among those who have been appointed chief minister under the system were Tun Sakaran Dandai, Datuk Salleh Tun Said, Datuk Yong Teck Lee, Tan Sri Bernard Dompok and Datuk Osu Sukam, who is serving his two-year term.

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether a federal cabinet reshuffle was imminent.

He replied in jest: "I don't know...sometimes it crosses my mind sometimes it doesn't. Of course I think about it but at the moment I don't have (any plan)."

On UPKO seeking to amend its constitution at this congress to enable it set up branches outside of Sabah, Dr Mahathir said it was the party's right to decide on the matter.

"We'll see first whether it is well-received or otherwise but so far there's no obstacles," he said.

The prime minister said although UPKO strove for the cause of the Kadazandusuns and Muruts in Sabah, it had also contributed towards improving the lot of the other communities.

"It's up to the Kadazandusun to determine," said Dr Mahathir when asked whether UPKO could function as a vehicle to fight for the the community's political cause in Sabah.

Asked on the defection of six PBS state assemblymen to the BN, including Bingkor assemblyman Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan, Dr Mahathir said: "We'll see first which of the arising problems could be resolved. The PBS is obviously aware that they are no longer interested in remaining in the PBS."

He was asked to comment on some problems faced by the six following a move by PBS president Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan to seek forfeiture of their legislature seats following their cross-over to the BN.

Pairin submitted letters to this effect to State Legislative Assembly Speaker Datuk Hassan Alban Sandukong last week.

In response to another question, Dr Mahathir said there was a need to identify products from Sabah and Sarawak which can be shipped to Peninsula as this could help reduce high shipping costs between the two territories.

"Today the trade is almost one-way. There are a lot of things coming from Peninsula to Sabah and Sarawak but little is going back, so the ships go empty. So we will try to find the products...Sabah has a very good potential for agriculture and fish production and I am quite sure they will

produce a lot more of this," he added.

-- BERNAMA

JS RYN