

Yong: Definite stand on **post** rotation needed

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KOTA KINABALLJ: Sabah Progressive Party president Datuk Yong Teck Lee said yesterday the state Barisan Nasional must make a definite stand on the two-year rotation of the chief minister's post well before the next state elections due in 2004.

He said the ruling coalition must decide whether to continue with the existing system or come up with a new formula before the term of present Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat ends in two years time.

Launching his party's eighth congress here, Yong a former rotated chief minister, said any uneasiness among Sabah Barisan parties on the new formula announced by Datuk

Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in March must be sorted out before the state polls so that the people would not view the coalition with suspicion.

Initially, the rotation system implemented since Barisan came into power in Sabah in 1994 saw a representative of the Muslim bumiputra, Chinese and non-Muslim bumiputra taking turns of two years each for the chief minister's post.

However, the Prime Minister announced the 2:1:1 formula for the rotation system which meant that after Chong of the Liberal Democratic Party who took over from Sabah Umno Datuk Osu Sukam, the post would again go back to Umno.

A non-Muslim bumiputra would then take over after two

years followed by Umno again.

Yesterday, Yong who became chief minister after the term of Datuk Salleh Tun Said also of Umno in 1996, noted that there had been difficulties in the rotation of the post from Umno to other Sabah Barisan parties.

"It also remains to be seen whether the people really believe that Umno would give up the chief minister's post again for the third time in 2005."

He said the reluctance of a rotated chief minister to step down was a destabilising factor in Sabah politics.

He added that should Sabah Barisan agreed to keep the rotation, then it must be made clear that the chief minister in 2005 would be a non-Muslim bumiputra.