

PM expected to declare stand on rotation system

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KOTA KINABALU: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is expected to end the "guessing game" about the chief minister's post during his two-day visit to Sabah beginning tomorrow.

Amid renewed calls to scrap the rotation system, political circles here anticipate that the Prime Minister will make his stand on the issue before Umno's Datuk Osu Sukam's two-year term ends next month.

If the system continues, Osu's successor would likely come from either the non-Muslim bumiputra community or from the Chinese community.

Anticipation had been growing since Osu announced that Dr Mahathir was scheduled to meet leaders from four Umno divisions — Beaufort, Sipitang, Gaya and Tanjung Aru — during his visit.

However, state Umno in-

formation chief Datuk Karim Ghani had since said that the meetings between the party president and the leaders and their branch heads were "nothing out of the ordinary."

"The meetings are in line with the Prime Minister's wish to get uncensored views from the grassroots," he said.

Some state Barisan officials said Dr Mahathir would probably keep the guessing game going until the last minute, just like in 1998 during the term of Sabah Progressive Party's Datuk Yong Teck Lee.

At that time, the choice was between Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah's Tan Sri Joseph Kurup and Tan Sri Bernard Dompok of United Pasok Kadazandusun Momogun Organisation (Upko).

Dompok was named to the chief minister's post only a few days before he took his oath of office on May 28.

Osu took over the post after Dompok lost his Moyog state assembly seat in the March 1999 state elections.

On Thursday, a group called Kumpulan Belia Pencinta Nusa (Cintanusa) submitted an eight-page memorandum to the office of Yang di-Pertua Negri Tun Sakaran Dandai which called for an end to the rotation system.

They said a copy would be handed over to Dr Mahathir during his visit here.

Dr Mahathir will open the 36th meeting of the SouthEast Asian Education Ministers conference on Monday.

Education ministers from Asean member countries, as well as Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and France are expected to attend the three-day conference.

Observers from the United Nations, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank are also expected to be present.