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Chong (Man in the News)

CHIEF MINISTER CHONG KAH KIAT-- "SURVIVOR" OF SABAH POLITICS

By: Jackson Sawatan

KOTA KINABALU, March 16 (Bernama) -- Pulau Tiga, a tropical island off Kuala Penyu in the west coast of Sabah, shot into international fame last year following the success of a popular American television series Survivor, which was shot on the island.

It became so popular that it prompted a British production company to produce the British version of the series, for which shooting is now in progress on the same island.

Who will win the honour in this British version of Survivor is not yet known but on the Sabah mainland, the answer to an equally puzzling riddle, albeit a more political one, is already known.

The rotation system is on and the new Sabah Chief Minister is none other than Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, the man who was the key figure in bringing the popular television show to this state.

Under the rotation system, Chong, 53, who is Tourism Development, Environment, Science and Technology Minister in the Datuk Osu Sukam Cabinet is replacing Osu and will head the state government for a two-year term ending in March 2003.

The new Sabah Chief Minister was named by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Kuala Lumpur today.

"I thank the Prime Minister and the BN for giving me this huge responsibility," Chong told reporters in Kuala Lumpur after the announcement.

"My job is to make sure that the BN will continue to be strengthened and I will work with all BN component parties," he said.

Born in Kudat on June 2, 1948, Chong Kah Kiat is in a way a survivor of Sabah politics -- he is the only leader from the Berjaya Government (1976-1985) who managed to survive all those tumultuous years in Sabah politics and make a great comeback.

He earned his law degree from Victoria University, New Zealand, in 1974 and contested and won the Kudat seat on a Berjaya ticket in the March 1981 state election.

He was appointed Assistant Minister to the Chief Minister the following year and held the post until April 1985 when he lost the seat to Datuk Wong Phin Chung of Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS).

He lost again to Wong in the 1986 state election.

In March 1987, he became a member of the Berjaya Supreme Council but later left the party when it became clear that it was losing ground.

Chong along with several Chinese leaders then founded the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 1989 and was made its protem secretary-general. Two years later he became its president.

He did not contest in the 1994 state election but a year later was appointed a member of the Dewan Negara, the upper house of the Federal Parliament, and the Prime Minister included him in his Cabinet as Minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

He resigned from the Federal Cabinet in March 1999 to contest in the state election.

This time he won back his traditional stronghold, Kudat, and was appointed State Minister of Tourism Development, Environment, Science and Technology.

Chong's LDP has one seat in the 54-member Sabah State Assembly that is Kudat and another seat in the Dewan Rakyat -- Sandakan.

-- BERNAMA  
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