

30/03/2001

New Sabah CM picks a strong Cabinet team to ensure success

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THE new Sabah Cabinet under Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat is made up of leaders who have the experience and capability to steer the State to greater heights.

Chong has included a former Chief Minister in Datuk Salleh Said and two ex-deputy Chief Ministers in Datuk Abdul Ghapur Salleh and Tan Sri Joseph Kurup in a move to further strengthen the Cabinet.

Salleh was appointed Minister of Local Government and Housing, while Ghapur and Kurup were made Minister in the Chief Minister's Department and Minister of Resource Development and Information Technology, respectively.

He had also appointed ministers to portfolios that suited them based on experience and capability.

The most significant repositioning of ministers involved Datuk Musa Aman, who has been given the senior Finance Minister's job.

In the previous Cabinet under Datuk Osu Sukam, Musa, who is Umno treasurer, was Minister in the Chief Minister's Department.

Being a successful businessman before joining politics, Musa's appointment as Finance Minister is appropriate, considering his vast experience in business and financial management.

With the effects of the 1997 financial crisis still lingering, Musa, with all his credentials, should be able to put the State back on sound financial footing.

"My new portfolio is a heavy responsibility which I will carry out to the best of my ability," said Musa, a former Sabah Foundation director and Sabah Bumiputera Chambers of Commerce president.

Another significant change in the new Cabinet is the promotion of Datuk Wences Anggang to Deputy Chief Minister and Minister of Infrastructure Development.

Anggang, who was formerly Minister of Resource Development and Information Technology, was one of the only two Kadazandusun Barisan Nasional candidates who won in the 1999 State election.

Having been an assistant minister for several years before being made a full minister after the 1999 State election, Anggang should be able to shoulder his new responsibility successfully.

Chong had also decided to appoint two assistant ministers in the Ministry of Agriculture Development and Food Industry and the Ministry of Rural and Entrepreneurial Development.

The new Chief Minister sees the two ministries as the key player in the development of the State, especially in relation to improving the rural folk's livelihood.

The two Assistant Ministers in the Agriculture and Food Industry Ministry are Datuk Siringan Gubat and Datuk Manan Jakasa, while the Assistant Ministers in the Rural and Entrepreneurial Development Ministry are Datuk Masrani Parman and Datuk Norjan Khan Bahadar.

Masrani's appointment to the ministry is crucial as his State constituency of Bengkoka is among the most backward in the country.

"Looking at the appointment of the new ministers and the repositioning of ministers, it is obvious Chong wants an action-oriented team," said Consumer Association of Sabah president Patrick Sindu.

The appointment of the new ministers and repositioning of ministers shows that Chong recognised how crucial it was to have an efficient and strong Cabinet to ensure that whatever weaknesses arising from the

rotation of the Chief Minister's post could be overcome.

He knows very well that the people of Sabah would be closely watching his performance after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had openly acknowledged that the rotation had created a series of "lame duck" Chief Ministers.

"Time will tell whether I will succeed," said Chong, who is known to be a "workaholic", adding that the bottom-line was performance and hard work.

He gave an undertaking to get members of his Cabinet as well as the assistant ministers to work very hard and to take a hands-on approach when carrying out their duties.

Chong has shown that he means business when he came to his new office on the 28th floor of the Sabah Foundation building well before 8am on his first day as Chief Minister.

He obviously knew that he has to lead by example as members of his Cabinet and the entire civil service would be looking up at him as the new chief executive of the State Government.

While Chong may be known for being a serious person when it comes to work, he is actually very approachable.

When Chong arrived for his first Press conference after taking his oath of office as the new Chief Minister, he apologised profusely to reporters for being late.

This shows how down-to-earth he is, a facet of his character that would endear him well to the people.

Salleh agrees with Chong that members of the State Cabinet and for that matter all assemblymen, must be people-friendly.

"We should look at our appointment (as ministers) as a responsibility and not a privilege," said Salleh, who served as Chief Minister between December 1994 and May 1996.

He is confident the new Cabinet will be able to live up to the people's expectations.

Two years may be too short a period for Chong and his new Cabinet to show significant results, but if all segments of the State administration give their full support, they should be able to make a positive impact on the development of the State.

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