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Sabah solution needed (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today a solution has to be found to the rotation system of the Sabah Chief Minister's post to ensure the smooth running of the State administration.

The Prime Minister and Barisan Nasional chairman said one weakness of the system, introduced in 1994 after the BN came to power, was the need to change the Chief Minister every two years.

"We could get a series of 'lame duck' Chief Ministers. Although we can live with it, a solution has to be found," he said when asked on the weaknesses of the system.

This is by far the clearest hint that there could be changes to the system.

He said frequent changes in the chief ministership could also bring about an ineffective government.

He was speaking at a Press conference after launching the Information Technology Literacy Gathering for K-economy at Stadium Putra in Bukit Jalil.

On Monday, Dr Mahathir said he would make an announcement on the system when the time came for Chief Minister Datuk Seri Osu Sukam to relinquish his post next month.

The rotation system was introduced to enable the leaders of Sabah's three main communities - the Muslim Bumiputera, Chinese and the non-Muslim Bumiputera - to head the State Government for a term of two years.

Citing the US presidency as an example, the Prime Minister said the President was considered a lame duck towards the end of his second term.

"Whatever he does, people don't seem to care much as they know he will eventually be replaced. Likewise, the Sabah Government will become ineffective if after every two years, the Chief Minister has to be replaced."

(Under the US Constitution, Presidents can only serve a maximum of eight years).

Dr Mahathir was also asked about the outcome of his separate meetings with Sabah-based BN leaders on Wednesday on the issue.

Besides Osu, the others were Liberal Democratic Party president Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Murut Organisation president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah president Tan Sri Joseph Kurup, Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat Bersatu president Datuk Pandikar Amin Mulia and Sabah Progressive Party president Datuk Yong Teck Lee.

Dr Mahathir said the leaders, besides giving him the mandate to decide on the system, also conveyed their views and conditions.

On Sabah Umno's stand, Dr Mahathir said it was already known that it wanted the system to be abolished.

He disagreed with a suggestion that Sabah Umno seemed reluctant to hand over the Chief Minister's post, saying the party was quite flexible in the matter.

Following the meetings, the Prime Minister said he was now waiting for the leaders to submit their views in "black and white".

On why this was necessary, he replied: "I heard views from six of them. I might forget what they said ... I am an old man."

On whether this was made as Sabah politicians were fond of changing their stand and allegiance, he said it was not so although he admitted

that there had been cases in the past where State leaders hopped to other parties.

In Kota Kinabalu, Osu said he believed Dr Mahathir would take into account views by State BN leaders before making a final decision on the matter.

"We discussed many aspects on the rotation. Also, as Sabah BN chairman and State Umno head, I have also given him my views. We now leave it to the Prime Minister to make an announcement," Osu said.

Asked about his plans should the rotation continue and somebody else was appointed to succeed him, Osu said he would wait for the announcement.

He told reporters this after launching the Kota Kinabalu City Esplanade near here last night.

Meanwhile, Kurup when approached by reporters upon his arrival from Kuala Lumpur last night, said his party would leave the decision to Dr Mahathir, who had "listened attentively" to his views on the matter.

"We also discussed other aspects for the benefit of Sabah, especially on ways to strengthen its economic development and unity."

Kurup said the party had yet to decide on a candidate for Chief Minister if the rotation system was continued.

Tun Sakaran Dandai from Umno was the first to be appointed Chief Minister under the system but made way for Datuk Salleh Tun Said when he became the Yang di-Pertua Negeri.

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