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Mahathir-Visit

SARAWAK HAS POTENTIAL TO GROW RAPIDLY, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUCHING, Feb 24 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wrapped-up a two-day visit to Sarawak today feeling satisfied that the state has developed remarkably and heading towards rapid growth.

"I think given the right kind of atmosphere, Sarawak has the potential to grow very rapidly. I'm quite satisfied with what I see and the attitude of Sarawakians," he said at a media conference at the Kuching International Airport before leaving for Kuala Lumpur this evening.

The prime minister met state Barisan Nasional (BN) leaders, federal and state civil officers and Bumiputra petty traders and held dialogues separately with them during his short but hectic visit.

He also opened Malaysia's first 200mm wafer foundry, 1st Silicon (M) Sdn Bhd, at the Sama Jaya Free Industrial Zone at Muara Tabuan near here yesterday.

Asked on his assessment on the Sarawak BN preparation to face the upcoming state election, Dr Mahathir said the coalition appeared to be ready.

"I didn't get a proper briefing of what they're are doing but I met with the leaders at a private session. It looks like that they are ready, they understand the problem and they understand the attitude of the people," said Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman.

Asked if the time was right to hold the election, he said any time was right whenever they were ready.

"...but don't hold elections just for the fun of it. It's a serious thing, we want to form government, that's why we hold elections, so be patient," he said.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, who is Sarawak BN chairman, and the two deputy chief ministers, Tan Sri Dr George Chan and Tan Sri Alfred Jabu, were present during the media briefing.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on the claims by certain quarters that Umno was expanding to Sarawak despite the party's repeated assurances that it had no plan to do so.

"I would like to tell the people of Sarawak that Umno is not coming here, anybody claiming to be Umno, they are not Umno," said Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president.

On the reported intention of former Defence Minister Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha to challenge Taib in the coming state election, Dr Mahathir said there anyone was free to challenge anyone else but he should not use Umno's name.

On the rotation system for the Sabah chief ministership, Dr Mahathir asked to be given time to make a decision on it.

"Give me timelah," he said.

All Sabah BN component parties are expected to submit their views in writing to the Prime Minister on whether the system should be maintained or not by the end of the week.

Asked if the security along the Sarawak-Indonesia border would be stepped up following the ethnic violence in central Kalimantan, Dr Mahathir said this would be done.

"We know that at present a lot of Indonesians wish to migrate to Malaysia. I read in the newspaper that nearly 1,300 people want to go to Johor, that's the problem we are facing," he said.

The Prime Minister, however, declined to comment on the conflict in

Sampit, central Kalimantan.

"That's another country's problem and we need not comment. But we are grateful this (ethnic conflict) doesn't happen in our country although the population is made up of various races," he said.

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