

29 DEC 2002

Sakaran-Mahathir

DR MAHATHIR IS GOD'S GIFT TO NATION, SAYS SAKARAN

By: Azman Ujang

KOTA KINABALU, Dec 29 (Bernama) -- Tun Sakaran Dandai, whose tenure as Sabah Yang Dipertua Negeri ends on Tuesday, has described Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as God's gift to the nation.

He said Dr Mahathir was a leader with vision as was evident from his success in bringing political stability to Sabah and unity to its people.

"I think Dr Mahathir is a leader whom God has bestowed on our nation. We see his vision. We see, for example, how difficult it is in Sabah to unite the people if you cannot see far ahead," he said in a special interview with Bernama at his private residence in Likas, here.

Sakaran said the rotation system for the Sabah chief minister's post, which Dr Mahathir introduced in 1994, was an example of the prime minister's far-sightedness because it brought political stability in the state which was previously rife with political upheavals among the various parties.

The leaders of the Barisan Nasional component parties are appointed as chief minister for a two-year term on a rotational basis and Sakaran was the first chief minister to be appointed under the system.

Sakaran, 72, however, held the post for only eight months before he was appointed Yang Dipertua Negeri exactly eight years ago.

He said that under the state constitution, the leader of the party that won the most seats in the state assembly was appointed chief minister and this was done in the past.

"The (leader of the) victorious party became the chief minister. But when he became the chief minister, he developed his own constituency and the others were left behind. As a result, some places in Sabah were left behind.

"Dr Mahathir saw all this and it was thank to this vision that he devised the rotation system for the chief ministership," he said

The veteran politician, who had fought for independence for Sabah through the Malaysian federation in the early 1960's, said that besides creating political stability, the rotation system also brought justice to all the communities in the state.

Sakaran believed that the system could also reduce the politicking in Sabah.

"There's political stability, justice for all the communities, so every community feels that it has been given equal opportunity, there's no relegation, no oppression.

"And when every community is given equal opportunity and their leader made chief minister he will support his people as well as the others. Maybe from this rotation, unity can be strengthened, politicking reduced and attention focused on bringing development to the people," he said.

He was also asked to comment on the perception that when a person is appointed chief minister he has too much power and that power is easily abused.

He said: "Such situations have happened many times and have also not happened. From time to time, whoever the chief minister is, there will be occasions when there are too many plans, requests and applications. So all these applications prompt us to find ways to fulfil their requests. We derive our power from their support.

"So, to repay their deeds, we try to find ways to help them and this is also the advice of Dr Mahathir, that when holding the reins of

administration, do the best you can to fulfil what you have pledged."

However, he said, the weakness of the system was that in two years a chief minister only had time to plan and then he was replaced.

Sakaran said that another vision of Dr Mahathir's that had come to fruition was his proposal in 1991 to bring Umno to Sabah so that the people of the state could be united and could enjoy development like those in the other states.

"When we first attained independence we were united under the Alliance government but in the end we split and Parti Berjaya and Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) were formed. All these parties have been tested by the people and our leaders. And Sabah was caught in disunity and this was detrimental to the people because it was difficult to bring development. But we are thankful to Dr Mahathir for his views and for bringing Umno to Sabah," he said.

He said that with the support of the federal leaders the people of Sabah could unite and leaders from Usno (which was dissolved following Umno's entry), Berjaya and PBS joined Umno.

Sakaran also said that security in Sabah was very good now compared with the time before the federal government stepped in.

"We see that previously the Sabah east coast was always plagued with robbers and pirates but with the federal government taking an interest in Sabah and the police and military facilities and patrols in place, we see peace.

"The fishermen are no longer afraid of raids by pirates. The entry of illegal immigrants has been curbed. Peace in Sabah is also attracting investors and tourists because the people are confident that our state is safe and prosperous, our cultures are respected and we are united and tolerant. This is very important," he said.

On his future, he said he would use his 54 years' experience in various posts, including as a federal cabinet minister, to help develop Islam and devote the rest of his life to the religion.

He would also help his children and grandchildren gain knowledge and join his friends in social work.

-- BERNAMA

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