

# PM: Chong not seeking extension

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is saddened by baseless claims that Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) president Datuk Chong Kah Kiat is seeking to extend the term of his chief ministership in Sabah.

"This is entirely false," he said when asked if Chong had sought to extend his position as Chief Minister of Sabah during a meeting with him recently.

"He came to me to suggest, if possible, going on leave for a month to allow his replacement to gain some experience for the job.

"He did not even suggest it. This is a really bad assumption by some people. These politicians (who made the

assumption) are indeed evil," he said after launching the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre yesterday.

LDP's turn of holding the Sabah chief minister's post is due to end in March. Under the state's unique rotation system, the chief minister's post is rotated among Sabah's three main communities once every two years.

Dr Mahathir, who is Barisan Nasional chairman, said an Umno leader would be appointed to the position when Chong's term expired.

In Kota Kinabalu, the Chief Minister's Department's press officer Raja Abidin Raja Sulong said Chong met Dr Mahathir and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on Jan 6 to reaffirm his commitment to step down by March 27.

To prove his sincerity in the matter, Raja Abidin said that Chong had written to Dr Mahathir on Dec 31 stating his intention to step down from the chief minister's post in 41 days.

"Chong's intention was made known to Dr Mahathir early to allow the Prime Minister to choose his successor as soon as possible," he added.

On possible Umno candidates for the post, Sabah Barisan politicians believe those in the running include state Umno chief and state Finance Minister Datuk Musa Aman, Minister in the Chief Minister's Department Datuk Abdul Ghapur Salleh and Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Lajim Ukin.

They, however, did not rule out the possibility of a surprise appointment.