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Chong-Leave

PM HAS YET TO DECIDE ON CHONG'S REQUEST FOR LEAVE

KOTA KINABALU, Feb 19 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, has yet to decide on Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat's request for leave in March prior to his completion of his two-year term as state chief executive on March 27.

Chong, who is Sabah Barisan Nasional (BN) Chairman, said he conveyed the request to Dr Mahathir on Feb 6 when he met him in the Federal administrative capital, Putrajaya, but as of now, the Prime Minister had not made any decision on the matter.

"My intention is very simple that is to request the Prime Minister to decide on my successor...if possible to decide once and for all so that there will be no unnecessary expectations or unnecessary lobbying problems so that we can continue with our work."

"I asked the Prime Minister if I can be allowed to hand over the post to my successor at least on an acting basis, if possible, in March because my term officially expires on March 27," he said after chairing the weekly State Cabinet meeting, at Wisma Innoprise, here today.

Chong said, "That means my successor, as the Prime Minister said very clearly, will act until I officially hand over on March 27 and the idea is that we have a term and we abide by that."

On Feb 11, Dr Mahathir had said that the post of Sabah Chief Minister which falls vacant next month following the expiry of the tenure of Datuk Chong Kah Kiat would be filled by Umno based on the rotation system.

Dr Mahathir, who is Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman, also denied allegations that Chong, who is President of the Sabah Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), had asked for his term to be extended.

The rotation system, introduced in 1994, provides an opportunity for leaders of the Muslim Bumiputeras, Chinese and non-Muslim Bumiputeras to assume the post of Sabah Chief Minister for a two-year term.

Chong is the sixth leader of a state BN component party to assume the post under the rotation system, taking over from Datuk Osu Sukam.

The first was Tun Sakaran Dandai, followed by Datuk Salleh Tun Said, Datuk Yong Teck Lee and Tan Sri Bernard Dompok.

The system however underwent slight modification two years ago when the present Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat was appointed to the post.

Under the new format, leaders from Umno would get two terms in each rotation as against only one for the Chinese and non-Muslim Bumiputeras.

When asked on the exact date of his intended leave, Chong said it would start "whenever the Prime Minister approves".

"If the Prime Minister does not make a decision then I will lead until March 27. By then, the Prime Minister will have decided."

"If the Prime Minister goes on leave, I am sure Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawai will announce the decision and in any event the decision will be made before March 27, mostly likely at the end of this month or in March," he said.

Asked on his willingness to remain in the state cabinet: Chong "Yes if I am wanted but whether I am in or out of the cabinet, I will still continue to serve the state."

"What is important is that I will do whatever I can." he said.

Asked on lengthy discussions with Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Lajim Haji Ukim and State Local Government and Housing Datuk Salleh Tun Said, who is also a former Chief Minister, this morning, Chong said it had something

to do with the affairs of their respective ministries.

"It is normal to have such discussions with my ministers after the state cabinet meeting especially whenever there are issues that need to be raised up directly to me."

But when asked if there was a special agenda, Chong, in jest, said, "No such thing, I met Salleh to discuss the garbage problems and cleanliness programme within the local government authority areas," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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