

08 SEP 2003

Mahathir - Rotation

ROTATION SYSTEM: IT'S UP TO SABAHANS

KOTA KINABALU, Sept 8 (Bernama) -- It is up to the people of Sabah to determine whether or not they want to continue with the rotation system of the State's Chief Minister, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Under the rotation system, a leader from UMNO will take over the post of Chief Minister each time the term of a particular community leader -- Non-Muslim Bumiputera or Chinese -- ends.

"We depend on what the people in Sabah want, we have to listen to their feelings and if they are happy with the system we will go ahead. If they are not happy, of course, we may have to change our minds," he said after opening the 18th Annual Congress of Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) in Penampang, near here.

The PBS was re-admitted to the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition in January last year.

Asked if he liked the rotation to continue, Dr Mahathir replied: "It is not a question of whether I like, it is a question of whether the Sabah people like."

The Prime Minister said that the BN had to respond to the wishes of the people on the matter.

"This is all about democracy," added the BN chairman.

Dr Mahathir mooted the idea of rotating the post of the State's Chief Minister among the three major communities -- Muslim Bumiputera, Chinese and the non-Muslim Bumiputera -- during the campaign for the 1994 State election.

It was to give the leaders of each community an opportunity to lead the State Government for a two-year term.

The system was implemented when the BN took over the reins of the State Government in March 1994.

However, it was modified slightly in March 2001, giving an Umno representative the opportunity to be Chief Minister each time the term of a particular community expired.

The system has so far seen the appointment of seven Chief Ministers.

On the impending Sabah election, Dr Mahathir stressed that it was important for the BN to win with a huge majority.

"We believe we can score a 100 per cent victory but we don't know. In an election there can be reasons we might lose some seats but what is important is that we must get a huge majority so that we can administer without obstacles," he said.

The term of the current State Legislative Assembly expires on April 12, 2004.

-- BERNAMA  
JS MK SRI