

11 FEB 2003

Mahathir-Sabah

UMNO TO TAKE OVER POST OF SABAH CHIEF MINISTER, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 11 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the post of Sabah Chief Minister which falls vacant next month following the expiry of the tenure of Datuk Chong Kah Kiat will be filled by Umno based on the rotation system.

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

He expressed utmost regret over such unfounded and baseless allegations and explained that Chong met him last Thursday over matters relating to him relinquishing his post.

"He came to see me to propose that if it's possible he wish to go on leave for a month prior to his successor taking over so that he could gain some experience in discharging his duties. That was his purpose when he saw me and not to seek an extension of his term, nothing of that sort. I didn't hear him utter anything about it.

"I think this suspicion by others is nothing more than that all politicians have bad intentions," he said when asked to comment on a column in a weekly which stated that Chong went to see him to ask him to consider extending his term as Chief Minister.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after launching the development of the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, soon to be a new distinctive landmark in the capital city.

Mingguan Malaysia's "Bisik-Bisik Minggu" column by Awang Selamat last Sunday stated that Chong met Dr Mahathir recently to ask him to consider extending his term as Sabah Chief Minister.

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

Chong is the sixth leader of the 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 Seri Mohamed Salleh Said, Datuk Yong Teck Lee and Tan Sri Bernard Dompok.

On the appointment of Chong's successor, Dr Mahathir said that the government would make the selection.

"There are no candidates, we don't have candidates...there's no such thing as applying to become the Chief Minister and there are no application forms. There are no forms whatsoever, there is nothing," he said.

Asked on the possibility that the Sabah state election be conducted simultaneously with the general election, Dr Mahathir said: "Everything's possible...if it's possible, there'll be a possibility."

Sabah needs to conduct its state election by April next year.

Last week, the Prime Minister dismissed speculation that the general election will be held before he steps down in October this year.

Asked on the suggestion by the Election Commission (EC) that all contesting parties and candidates be required to sign a pledge commencing from the next general election, Dr Mahathir said that he was not aware of the matter but that it could be among the EC's proposals.

"But we can definitely...there's no problem as far as we (BN) are concerned but it's the others. Seeing that they cannot win, they tend to resort to violence," he said.

On the suggestion that candidates breaching their pledge may stand to

lose their eligibility to contest, Dr Mahathir said that he does not know about that but it requires scrutiny as it was only a proposal by the EC.

"We don't know anything yet, how then to make comments," he said.

EC chairman Datuk Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman was today reported to have said that election candidates breaching their pledge by resorting to unhealthy practices including aggressive campaigning would stand to lose their eligibility to contest from the next general election.

Asked on the briefing given by the EC yesterday, Dr Mahathir said that he was briefed on electronic voting and its mechanism.

"The EC conducted a demonstration for me. But the government has not considered on whether or not to opt for electronic voting," he said.

The Prime Minister however did not dismiss the possibility that electronic voting may be adopted as it was more up-to-date and it facilitates a speedier tally of the ballot papers.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on the proposal by the Kelantan and Terengganu Umno liaison bodies that election candidates for the two states be determined earlier.

"I've said that I'll look into it. If earlier, how much earlier, a year earlier, 10 years earlier or a day earlier...they're all earlier, relatively," he said.

On Terengganu Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang's meeting with individuals linked with terrorism and extremism, Dr Mahathir hoped that they do not get involved in criminal activities.

"They meet people, it's alright but we want to know, they meet people for what. If they meet in order to plan some acts of violence, of course they'll be culpable," he said.

A local daily last week reported that Abdul Hadi has attended a congress also attended by Jemaah Islamiyah leader Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Laskar Jundullah leader Agus Dwikarna.

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