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Equitable representation in Government could be an option

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THE future of the rotation system of the Sabah Chief Minister's post has come into question again.

The issue has been hogging the headlines of local newspapers, with State Barisan Nasional component leaders giving their views on the matter.

Some want the system to be scrapped, while others want a new power-sharing concept or formula.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had said during his recent visit to Sabah that it was up to the State BN to decide the future of the rotation system.

The system was implemented when the BN took over the State Government in 1994 after the collapse of the Parti Bersatu Sabah government following a spate of defections by its assemblymen to the BN.

Mooted by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad as an election promise in the 1994 State election, the system was to enable leaders of the three main communities - the Muslim Bumiputera, non-Muslim Bumiputera and Chinese - to head the State Government on a two-year rotational basis.

In the nine years since the system was introduced, Sabah has seen seven Chief Ministers.

The first Chief Minister appointed under the system was Tun Sakaran Dandai, who was succeeded by Datuk Seri Salleh Tun Said when he (Sakaran) was appointed Sabah's Yang di-Pertua Negeri in December, 1994.

Others who have served as Chief Minister under the system were Sabah Progressive Party (Sapp) president Datuk Yong Teck Lee, United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun Organisation (Upko) president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, Datuk Osu Sukam and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) president Datuk Chong Kah Kiat who was succeeded by current Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman in March.

Musa, who is State BN chairman, said he would call for a State BN meeting before the State election to discuss the matter.

"We will heed the Prime Minister's view to leave the matter for the State BN to decide," said Musa, who is also State Umno liaison committee chairman.

BN component party leaders felt that a decision on the matter should be made before the State election so that any new power-sharing formula could be included in the BN manifesto.

The PBS had consistently opposed the rotation system despite having rejoined the BN.

Its deputy president Datuk Dr Maximus Ongkili had described the rotation system as a "costly business" for the people and the administration machinery.

Another PBS deputy president, Dr Yee Moh Chai, echoed Ongkili's view, saying there had been too much politicking because of the rotation system and ultimately, the victims are the "rakyat".

Yong and Dompok felt that a review of the system was appropriate.

Dompok said a meeting to discuss the future of the rotation system was long overdue.

"Upko is looking for a 'formal power sharing' proposal which reflects the wishes of the various communities in the State," Dompok said.

Upko and another State BN component party, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS), have never opposed the rotation system.

Many see Sabah Umno, being the backbone of the State BN, as having a

major say on the future of the system.

Salleh, its deputy chief, said Sabah Umno would propose a new power-sharing arrangement to replace the system. "We will initiate a meeting with the other BN components to deliberate on our proposal," said Salleh.

After nearly 10 years, the people of Sabah are the best judge to determine if the rotation system has brought about positive changes to the State.

One pertinent question is whether the rotation of the Chief Minister's post alone is sufficient to reflect a true power-sharing concept.

Indeed, there is another relevant issue - ensuring a fair representation from the various communities in the State administration, including in the State Cabinet.

The 11-member State Cabinet is made up of six Muslim Bumiputera Ministers, three Chinese and two non-Muslim Bumiputera, while for the 14 posts of assistant ministers 12 are Muslim Bumiputera and one each from the non-Muslim Bumiputera and Chinese community.

The State BN cannot be blamed for the minimal representation of the non-Muslim Bumiputera in the Cabinet because many of the BN Kadazandusun candidates lost to the PBS in the last State elections.

But with the PBS, a pre-dominantly Kadazandusun-based party, back in the BN fold, the non-Muslim Bumiputera can expect a better representation in the State administration after the next State election.

Dompok had once proposed a 40-40-20 formula with the Muslim Bumiputera and non-Muslim Bumiputera having an equal representation and the Chinese making up 20 per cent of all posts in the State Government.

Dompok is likely to raise it again at the next State BN meeting.

"I am all for anything that would bring about a solution to the problems envisaged when the rotation system was introduced," said Dompok, who is also Minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

An equitable representation of the various communities would not only strengthen the State administration, but will also gain the confidence and trust of the people.