

Analysts believe Hajiji will appoint Chinese rep into multi-racial Sabah govt

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Datuk Hajiji Noor at his office at the Sabah State Administrative Centre. – File Picture/Bernama

LABUAN (Oct 7) – The absence of Chinese representation in the new Sabah government is not something that cannot be set right, according to analysts.

They reason that a Chinese individual can be selected to fill one of the six posts of nominated assemblyman that the ruling Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS) coalition can create as per the Sabah constitution.

And, they feel a special portfolio can be set up, such as Minister in the Chief Minister's Department in charge of the Chinese community's interests.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) political analyst Dr Romzi Ationg said the new government led by Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Mohd Noor can appoint a technocrat or professional as a nominated assemblyman and Cabinet minister.

“We want to see a state government that is multiracial and a diverse Cabinet to ensure no particular race in the state is marginalised. The Chinese community deserves a voice in the Cabinet. I strongly believe the newly-appointed Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Mohd Noor is not going to abandon or forsake any community,” he said in an interview with Bernama.

Romzi said the Sabah government can emulate the federal government initiative of appointing former banker Tengku Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz as a senator and the finance minister.

The Chinese business community has long been Sabah's economic pillar and plays a crucial role in the economic development of the state, he said.

“We must not marginalise any race in Sabah as it will only create disharmony among the multiracial people here and will have an impact on the people's integration, socially and economically, in the long run. We must not allow the Chinese community to feel that they are being sidelined,” he said.

The Chinese community accounts for over 11 per cent of the Sabah population.

Hajiji could not appoint a Chinese as a deputy chief minister because no Chinese candidate from GRS won in the state election on Sept 26. It has been the tradition in Sabah to have a Chinese as one of the three deputy chief ministers.

Even former chief minister and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) honorary life president Tan Sri Chong Kah Kiat lost in Inanam.

However, Hajiji has said that he will be looking into the matter, and will make an announcement in due course.

Deputy Chief Minister 1 Datuk Seri Bung Moktar Radin, when contacted, also echoed a similar view, saying the matter will be discussed.

The two other deputy chief ministers are Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan (STAR president) and Datuk Dr Joachim Gunsalam (PBS vice-president).

UMS Labuan International Campus Assoc Prof Dr Geoffrey Tanakinjal said he is optimistic representatives (from the communities) will be appointed to various new important portfolios for the government to build a stronger foundation for the state's economy, especially in fields such as finance and investment; oil and gas; and maritime.

“I wish the elected representatives will serve the people first and not their political parties. The reality bites; sometimes this is not always the case and priority will be given to the supporters. When this happens, it will definitely create cracks in the social standing and perhaps the economy as well.

“Nevertheless, the maturity of our leaders is the key to a better future. Nobody should be neglected. Only by moving as one entity, can Sabah be great again,” he told Bernama.

Labuan BIMP-EAGA Business Council chairman Azhar Othman said the Chinese community wants a government that is stable and business friendly (with an expansive economic policy with incentives for growth), has an efficient machinery and ensures zero corruption.

“It will help if you have (Chinese) representation, but (the candidate may) not necessarily (be) a technocrat.

“Several mega people-oriented projects like the Pan Borneo (Highway) must be revived, expedited. The state must be more transparent in the awarding of projects, and meritocracy is preferred,” he said. — BERNAMA