

Time for new Sabah govt to prove critics wrong

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By **Avila Geraldine** - October 9, 2020 @ 10:10am



(From left) Dr Romzi Ationg, Phoong Jin Zhe, Phoong Jin Zhe)

KOTA KINABALU: The newly-formed Sabah cabinet line-up will be a test for the Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS) state government to prove its critics wrong and display its capability by bringing progress to the people.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah academician Dr Romzi Ationg said following GRS' victory in the recent election, the people were expecting the new state government, led by Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor, to make significant contributions.

He said while the new state cabinet reflected diversity and the people's ambitions, it could be improved further by having more young people, women and Chinese representatives.

"The rakyat expects them (GRS) to provide significant contributions to the development of Sabah in line with the principles that this is a state rich in diversity. Let's hope the state government can do its best for them.

"I expect the state government to continue ensuring and improving political stability, as well as focusing on holistic development," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Romzi, an ethno-politics expert, however, said drawbacks included the lack of Chinese representatives, which could weaken the perception of the state government.

This, he said, was something the chief minister must address.

"Having no Chinese lawmakers will affect the popularity of the state government, especially among urban voters who are mostly Chinese.

"The inclusion of Chinese representatives in the administration can boost the Chinese community's confidence and tackle ethnic relations issues, thus ensuring their support for the state government."

On the appointment of state Pas secretary Dr Aliakbar Gulasan as a state assemblyman, Romzi said Aliakbar should be given the opportunity to prove himself.

He agreed with the perception that most Sabahans were not receptive of Aliakbar's appointment as he was from an Islamic party, and that the people feared it would further fuel religious sentiments in the state.

"That is one reason. But this (appointment) also suggests it is going against the slogan of state autonomy if the appointment did take place due to a request by federal leaders," he said.

Sabah DAP Youth chief Phoong Jin Zhe said Hajiji's cabinet lacked the diversity of past years.

The Luyang assemblyman said apart from lacking Chinese representation, Hajiji also did not appoint any woman or youth representative to hold top position in the state cabinet.

On a positive note, Phoong, who was state youth and sports minister, congratulated his successor, Datuk Ellron Alfred Angin, whom he believed would play his role well.

"He was a national athlete and an experienced officer from the state sports board. Given his experience, I hope that he will continue my plans on developing the sports sector and lead Sabah towards becoming a sporting powerhouse."

Parti Warisan Sabah information chief Datuk Dr Yusof Yacob said the newly-formed state cabinet was not a "solid combination" as it was mostly made up of new faces who did not possess outstanding achievements of their own.

"I hope they can do their best when given the opportunity. This new cabinet is recycled and does not pursue the changes brought about by the Warisan-led government.

"There are some people who have quality, experience and qualifications, but are not being absorbed into the cabinet or made assistant ministers. We just have to wait and see."