

Mahathir: Umno will consider merger proposal

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad is confident that Umno will consider Parti Pesaka Bumiputra Bersatu's application for a merger.

Speaking to reporters at his office today, the Deputy Prime Minister said the PBB, a Sarawak party, had not yet officially applied to merge with Umno.

Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir, who is also Umno vice-president, added that the Umno Supreme Council would discuss the application when it is made.

He said he knew of the move from PBB president Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Haji Abdul Rahman Yakub several months before the general election.

Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir was commenting on a statement by Datuk Patinggi Rahman in Kuching yesterday that he would fly here next week for talks on the merger.

Advantages

He added that with Umno in Sarawak, the close relations between the State and Peninsular Malaysia would be further strengthened.

Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir said he personally believed that there were advantages in the PBB-Umno merger.

"But such a move is being restricted by the Umno constitution which provides that membership is open only to Malays. This is contrary to PBB's membership which is for all bumiputras irrespective of religion.

"However, there are some non-Malays — like the Thais in Kedah — who are Umno members. But I don't know whether they are official or unofficial members," he added.

Asked whether Umno would amend its constitution to allow for the merger, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir said: "It all

depends on the interests of our struggle. If we can amend the country's constitution, I don't see why we can't change that of our party."

He added that Umno was interested in knowing whether the merger move was initiated by Datuk Patinggi Rahman or whether party members had approved of such a move.

"We don't want this merger be forced on PBB members. It is not our policy to do so. Even if the merger materialised, it will not mean that some Umno personalities from Peninsular Malaysia will dominate Sarawak's political scene because it is also not our policy to take over," he added.

Relations

Even without the merger, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir said, there existed very close relations between Umno and PBB leaders.

Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir said Datuk Patinggi Rahman was once an Umno member and in 1965, he was one of the Supreme Council member when he was Minister of Lands and Mines.

"Datuk Patinggi Rahman received the highest vote when he contested for a seat in the Umno Supreme Council," he added.

Asked whether Usno from Sabah would also be given consideration if it applied for a merger with Umno, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir said: "We have to judge each case according to its merit, situation and position."

Usno special general assembly in July 1976 passed a resolution to dissolve the party in principle if its membership in Umno was accepted by the Umno Supreme Council.

The matter was brought up at an Umno Supreme Council meeting and was referred to the party's political bureau headed by Datuk Hussein Onn for further consideration.

No decision had been made on the matter.