

Mahathir gets PBS' counter-proposals

By AHMAD A. TALIB

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad received yesterday counter-proposals to his "Sabah Formula" from Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan, but there was still no indication that this will end problems in the east Malaysian state.

Full details of the counter-proposals were however not immediately known. It was also not certain whether Datuk Pairin, who flew into the federal capital on Sunday, had met the Prime Minister but he had a short meeting in the afternoon with Encik Abdul Ghafar Baba, the Barisan Nasional secretary-general.

At the end of the day, Datuk Pairin issued a short statement emphasising that Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) will pursue the objectives of cooperation with other parties after the elections. The PBS, he declared, supports the Barisan under Dr Mahathir and that it was still open for discussions.

The PBS is the only party which has not agreed fully to Dr Mahathir's formula even though Datuk Pairin had already agreed to it in principle when the Prime Minister flew to Sabah early last week. Essentially, the formula calls for a coalition among the three parties in Sabah

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with Datuk Pairin as the Chief Minister.

Datuk Pairin played a cat and mouse game with about 40 waiting newsmen at the Shangri-La yesterday. Hotel operational staff were tight-lipped when asked for Datuk Pairin's whereabouts while security guards maintained a tight blanket around the hotel.

Datuk Pairin left the hotel in an unmarked car through one of the hotel's side exits. An aide said he was leaving for Kota Kinabalu.

In a statement handed to journalists by his legal adviser, Datuk Pairin said: "PBS will pursue the objectives of cooperation with other parties after the elections.

"We in PBS believe in the democratic process and the people's right to exercise their freedom of choice in an election which must be respected.

Democracy must not only be said to be practiced but must be seen to be practiced."

He said it is fundamental to its position that the PBS is a multi-racial party.

"It must also be emphasised that any suggestion along the lines that Usno is the sole representative of Muslims in Sabah is misconceived and will introduce a religious element into politics.

"Communal politics is complex enough and introducing religious politics is most undesirable. It will also impose Usno on all Muslims in Sabah irrespective of whether they are members of Usno or not.

"This will be most unfair to Muslims who are not members of Usno, particularly Muslims who are members of PBS."