

## It's a stab in the back, says Mahathir

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the PBS decision to quit the Barisan Nasional is a stab in the back.

He said he had expected the decision, but not the timing.

"I thought they (the PBS) would wait until the results of the general election ... if they found the Barisan's performance not good, they would switch over to the Semangat 46," he said,

adding that he had always suspected PBS loyalty.

The Prime Minister and Barisan chairman said PBS president Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan appeared to have made the decision some time ago.

He said Datuk Pairin telephoned him before he visited Sabah yesterday, suggesting that he should not go to the state.

"But I told him I could not change my programme because Usno wanted me to go," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Sabah Chief Minister even asked to vet his (Dr Mahathir's) speech.

When he rejected the suggestion, Datuk Pairin wanted him to make certain promises, he said.

"I told him no promises ... but in his speech (when I was in Sabah), he demanded that the royalty for oil revenue be increased, that Sabah be allowed to set up a special television station and a university," Dr Mahathir

said. S 16.10.90

Dr Mahathir said he did not reply to the demands beyond stating that he could not make those decisions because he was heading a caretaker government.

"But I said that after we formed the next government, maybe this could be brought up ... maybe this created unhappiness although he did not give any indication," he added.

He described the demands as "a form of

blackmail," and added that the PBS knew that the Barisan was facing a general election.

He believed the PBS was doing it for "a specific aim."

The Prime Minister said the PBS claimed that there were 20 demands which the Federal Government had yet to fulfil.

"But we ourselves have never brought up the question of the Sabah

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Government not fulfilling all kinds of agreements made through the inter-government committee," he added.

He said the Sabah Government began to ask for an increase in oil royalty when it found it had a lot of oil.

"But Sabah forgot that before it found oil, it depended on aid derived from oil revenue from Sarawak and Terengganu," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the opposition front manifest to had promised that it

would increase the oil royalty of the various states to win support.

Dr Mahathir said it had now been proven that Datuk Pairin's claim that the PBS was not fielding any independent candidate against Usno was "not accurate."

"They will make sure that Usno is defeated ... and maybe even the Labuan parliamentary seat (where Umno is contesting)," he said.

He said he believed that the PBS would win all 20 seats it was contesting be-

cause it had "poisoned the minds of Sabahans to hate the Federal Government."

However, he said, there were still 160 parliamentary seats to be contested by the Barisan.

Dr Mahathir said he believed that the Barisan would still form the next government but admitted that "it may be more difficult to maintain our two-thirds majority."

"But we will still try," he said.

He said he expected the opposition now to be more spirited and even more capable in its campaign.

Asked whether Sabah might eventually pull out from Malaysia, he replied: "They cannot ... it's against the law and constitution."

He said the PBS decision was "unhealthy" and he hoped that Sabahans would think seriously before casting their vote for the PBS.

Asked what action the Barisan would take, he said the Barisan would not do anything.

On whether he would negotiate with Datuk Pairin, he replied: "I don't think so ... when a person stabs you in the back, you

don't pull out the knife and negotiate with him."

He noted that Semangat 46 president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah had said that Sabah and Sarawak would be the "king makers."

"I believe that the PBS and the Semangat had forged an alliance earlier," he said.

Dr Mahathir did not think that the development would affect the Barisan's performance in the general election, but said that Umno, the MCA and MIC and Gerakan would redouble their efforts in the campaign.

He said the Federal Government was not upset that Sabah was now under the opposition because the PBS was an opposition party before joining the Barisan.

"It is nothing unusual, but it may affect national integration. It can also create political conflicts unhealthy to the nation because he (Datuk Pairin) wants to play kingmaker," he added.

Dr Mahathir said he preferred a state government that had a good relationship with the Federal Government.

"And a good relationship can be achieved with parties in the same coalition in charge of the state and federal governments," he said.