

PM: PBS can join BN if Pairin is out

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KOTA KINABALU: The Barisan Nasional may accept Parti Bersatu Sabah into the coalition if the party changed its leadership, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

The Barisan Nasional chairman said the coalition had never closed its doors to the PBS, but the party must fulfil certain conditions before it could return to the fold.

"There is a strong possibility that we may accept them if new leaders are brought into the party," he told a press conference when asked if the Barisan would consider accepting PBS into the coalition fold.

Dr Mahathir said he had no quarrel with the people of Sabah or the Kadazans, but the Barisan's problem was with PBS

president Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan "who was a leader convicted of corruption and had no leadership qualities."

Pairin should step down as PBS president and as chief minister because of his conviction and must apologise to the people in Sabah, he said.

Asked if he had met Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan who intended to contest the Bingkor seat, Dr Mahathir said he did meet Dr Kitingan before Pairin requested the state assembly to be dissolved.

"I met him after he was released (from ISA detention on Dec 22) because I was curious to know what kind of a person he had become. I have known him for a long time.

"We have had no quarrel before. In fact, I had helped him before," he

said, adding that he hoped Dr Kitingan would make a wise decision if he loved Sabah and the people.

"He will make a wrong decision if he sided with his family," the Prime Minister said.

To whether Dr Kitingan was a changed person, Dr Mahathir said: "Now at least he understands the Federal Government's stand towards Sabah and Malaysia.

"But whether he agrees or not (to Federal Government views) is a different matter. In the past, he watched the Government from afar and assumed that the Government was wrong," he added.

Asked if Dr Kitingan would be able to help PBS regain entry into Barisan, he said it was up to Dr Kitingan's sincerity in subscribing to the coal-

tion's principles.

In order for Dr Kitingan to help improve state-federal relations, he must ensure that PBS adhered to the BN coalition's concept, he said.

Asked whether he had met PBS deputy president Datuk Bernard Dompok, Dr Mahathir said Dompok did not meet him.

"But I know there are a lot of Kadazan leaders who want to leave PBS because Pairin is only fighting for himself.

"Not only the Kadazans, even former Usno members are not satisfied with him because of the choice of candidates," he said.

On Tun Datu Mustapha Datu Harun who resigned from Umno recently, Dr Mahathir said there was a possibility that certain quarters were trying to use him to discredit BN.