

BN SET TO RULE SABAH

PM: Coalition now has majority in assembly

By LEE KAR YEAN

KUALA LUMPUR: The Barisan Nasional is ready to form the new Sabah Government as five more assemblymen defected from the ruling Parti Bersatu Sabah in the past 48 hours, leaving the three-week-old PBS state government on the verge of collapse.

As at last night, the Barisan has a total of 32 seats in the state assembly against the PBS' 22.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the new government would be formed "as soon as possible" as the

coalition now had the majority in the state assembly.

The Prime Minister, who is also the Barisan chairman, said the coalition would submit a letter to Yang di-Per-tua Negri Tun Mohamed Said Keruak on the matter.

"We will present the documents (to Keruak) at the right time in accordance with the Sabah Constitution and the laws in forming the new government," he told reporters on the second day of his Hari Raya open house at Seri Perdana here.

Dr Mahathir added that a no-confidence vote would be tabled against the PBS state government at the Sa-

bah Assembly sitting on Friday.

"We hope the majority of the state assemblymen can then decide to form the new government," he said.

Dr Mahathir's statement came in the wake of a series of defections of PBS assemblymen, members of Parliament and senators to Barisan component parties and to the newly-formed Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS) (see story below).

Among the latest to have left the PBS are party secretary-general Datuk Joseph Kurup, Sabah Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Chau Tet On and Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan, the younger brother of Sabah Chief Minister

Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan.

The Prime Minister said that based on the number of PBS state assemblymen who had left the party, the BN now had the required majority.

"I see that it is no longer possible for PBS to continue governing because it is clear now that the number (of PBS state assemblymen) is less than half (of the state assembly) despite the additional six appointed assemblymen," he said.

According to Dr Mahathir, about three-quarter of the 25 elected PBS state assemblymen had decided to

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leave the party to join another or form a new one.

On the newly-formed PBRS, he said the Barisan would accept its application to join the coalition.

Dr Mahathir also said the Barisan would carry out its promises contained in its manifesto, including the agreement that the chief minister's post be rotated among the three major communities in

Sabah every two years.

On his meeting with Dr Kitingan on Monday night, Dr Mahathir said he had stressed on the importance that all parties in Sabah set up a responsible government.

He wanted the new government to concentrate on the development of the state and welfare of the people.

For this, the slogan *Sabah for*

Sabahan should be dropped and efforts made to foster better co-operation with the Federal Government, he said.

"Only with such co-operation can the Federal Government assist in the development of Sabah.

"In the past, the slogan *Sabah for Sabahan* had been used but this had benefited only a small group of Sabahans," he added.