

A dmission of Sabah parties:

BN defers decision

By
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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — The Barisan Nasional supreme council tonight deferred a decision on whether to accept applications by the three newly-formed Kadazan/Dusun-based parties to join the ruling coalition.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the decision was based on the fact that the position and structure of the newly-formed parties were unclear.

He, however, made it clear that the council did not reject the applications by the Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRs), Parti Demokratik Sabah Bersatu (PDSB) and the Parti Demokratik Sabah (PDS).

"We decided that the parties must be properly structured with a list of officials and members and have given them the latest by May 30 to do so.

"But if possible they should organise their party structure before May 1.

"We want to determine the position of the parties before the Harvest Festival in Sabah," he told reporters after the meeting at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC).

Also present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who is also Umno deputy president, and heads of all Barisan Nasional component parties.

PBRs pro tem president Datuk Joseph Kurup and PDSB pro tem president Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan also attended the meeting.

He said the council unanimously decided that besides the appointment of Chief Minister Tan Sri Sakaran Dandai, who is the Sabah Barisan Nasional chairman, all other Cabinet positions will be left vacant for the time being.

Dr Mahathir said the positions will be filled as soon as possible with fair representation from the three main communities in the State — the Bumiputera Muslims, the Kadazan/Dusun and the Chinese.

Dr Mahathir said the Barisan Nasional State Government would continue its administration of the State under Sakaran.

The decision not to fill the vacancies in the State Cabinet would not affect the smooth administration of the State, he added.

Dr Mahathir reiterated that the Barisan Nasional would fulfil all promises

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made in its manifesto for the recent State elections.

He said the council did not set any conditions for the entry of the three parties except that they must adhere to the principles and struggles of the Barisan Nasional and they must be properly structured.

Asked whether the three parties had been accepted in principle into the Barisan Nasional, he said: "We cannot say that, of course, because we may be accepting one party only if they amalgamate.

"But we are saying that we did not reject them."

Dr Mahathir said the council agreed that Umno secretary-general Datuk Mohamed Rahmat would serve as the Barisan Nasional secretary-general.

Mohamed said neither pro tem PDS president Datuk Bernard Dompok nor his representative attended the meeting although Dr Mahathir had informed the former of the meeting and

asked him to attend.

Meanwhile, Sakaran told reporters that the Sabah State Cabinet was expected to be formed before Dr Mahathir's visit to the State on April 2.

He said he would be meeting Dr Mahathir in a day or two to discuss the matter.

"We plan to appoint the State Cabinet before the Prime Minister's visit," Sakaran said.

He said a State banquet would also be held in the Prime Minister's honour in conjunction with his visit to the State.

Sakaran said he would also hold a meeting with other BN component party members on his return to Sabah to prepare for the visit by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, scheduled for Monday.

On the Land and Co-operative Development Minister's post which he had vacated before his appointment as Chief Minister, he said it was the prerogative of the Prime Minister to appoint his successor.

However, he hoped that the vacant position would be filled up by a leader from Sabah.

Kurup and Jeffrey told reporters that they were satisfied with the council's decision and would comply with requirements spelt out for admission of their parties.

Asked whether the three parties could amalgamate, Jeffrey said: "We will see."

Kurup said he planned to hold "heart-to-heart" talks with Dompok and Jeffrey to strike an understanding with regard to their parties' bids to join the coalition.

He said the meeting was necessary to reach a compromise for the sake of the people of Sabah.

"We will try our level best to have the meeting ... If possible, I hope to organise it tomorrow or on Thursday," he said.

Asked whether the three parties had differences that prevented them from reaching a compromise, he said: "I think there has been some miscommunication ... at the lower level."