

# PM welcomes PBS' move to rejoin Barisan

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## 'It is a good thing to happen'

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Parti Bersatu Sabah's decision to rejoin Barisan Nasional is "a good thing."

"The more the merrier," quipped the Prime Minister when reporters asked him about the PBS move to return to the coalition, which now houses 14 parties.

"I think it is a good thing to happen," he said at the MIC Deepavali open house at the SM Chong Hwa in Jalan Ipoh yesterday.

However, in an apparent reference to PBS' unexpected exit from the fold prior to the October 1990 general election, Dr Mahathir said Barisan needs to look at the credentials and sincerity of the PBS.

"We do not want to see what the Malays call *pisang berbuah dua kali* (a Malay idiom similar to the English saying, once bitten twice shy). It must not," he said.

PBS was admitted into Barisan on June 5, 1986, about a year after it was formed. But a week before the 1990 general election, the party pulled out from the Barisan to join the opposition front of that time which was spearheaded by the now-defunct Parti Melayu Semangat 46, led by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

The Prime Minister described the PBS action then as "a stab in the back." He has since repeatedly said that PBS would not be allowed to rejoin the Barisan.

Asked about this, the Barisan chairman said:

"At that moment, I made some statements but if you remember... I also said I will never accept Tengku Razaleigh and now he is with

us." Dr Mahathir added that he was a "very forgiving person."

Asked what would happen to the chief minister's rotation system currently practised in Sabah when PBS rejoins Barisan, Dr Mahathir said: "It depends on the wishes of Sabahans.

"We gave them a formula. But we know PBS' stand. They do not like it because of disruptions," he said.

Regarding the alleged misappropriation of funds under the Hardcore Poor Development Programme (PPRT), Dr Mahathir said the Government could not freeze the programme unless the allegations were proven.

"We have to find out what actually happened. As I know, PPRT does not have lots of money but this involves tens of millions (of ringgit).

He agreed the matter had been politicised but added that it was inevitable.

On another matter, Dr Mahathir said the Government had taken into consideration the reluctance of banks to lend in its efforts to stimulate the economy.

"We have taken measures which do not depend so much on banks. We have a lot of funds (which provide loans to businessmen). We are giving money to F Class contractors quickly. If they do their work, they will get their money, the money is already there," he said.

He said businessmen should strive to repay their loans.

"We have always urged banks to treat small borrowers with greater consideration but sometimes they (bank managers) want to be prudent," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said the Government would have to study the role of sending Malaysian soldiers to Afghanistan under the United Nations.

He said he had not decided on the list of candidates for the post of Datuk Bandar of Kuala Lumpur, which is due to be appointed this month.

In Ipoh, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the Barisan would not accept any conditions from the PBS to join the coalition.

He was commenting on a statement by PBS Youth chief Almudin Kaida that the movement would not oppose the party's move to join Barisan as long as the Government resolved several long-standing problems in Sabah.

"We do not like, and cannot accept, if PBS wants to join Barisan by setting conditions," he told reporters after laying the foundation for a five-storey RM9.5mil Perak Umno building in Jalan Gopeng here.

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said the Government had taken serious and ongoing measures to address problems like the influx of illegal immigrants into Sabah.

"They (PBS) claimed that the number of illegal immigrants has not reduced but without our close supervision the numbers would have increased," he said, adding that the Government would beef up enforcement around Semporna and along the coastal areas between the Philippines and Sabah.

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# PM and not King picks Chief Judge, says UN official

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KUALA LUMPUR: It is the Prime Minister and not the King who selects the Chief Judge under the Federal Constitution, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers Datuk Param Cumaraswamy said.

He said that under Article 122B, the Chief Judge was appointed by the King on the advice of the Prime Minister who consults the Chief Justice and the Conference of Rulers.

He said this in response to the statement by recently retired Court of Appeal president Tan Sri Lamin Yunus that senior lawyer Raja Aziz Addruse had been disrespectful to the King when he questioned the appointment of Justice Datuk Ahmad Fairuz Sheikh Abdul Halim over Justice Datuk Abdul Malek Ahmad as Chief Judge of Malaya, in an article in the Malaysian Bar journal *Insaf*.

"Tan Sri Lamin's view clearly goes against the grain of the constitutional position of the King over judicial appointments," said Param.

He added that Lamin him-

self had ruled that the King only acted on the advice of the prime minister when dismissing Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's application in March last year to disqualify Court of Appeal Justice Datuk Mokhtar Sidin from hearing the former deputy prime minister's appeal.

Param said Lamin's current views were "not only incorrect but inconsistent with his own earlier judicial decision."

Citing Principle 13 of the UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, he said: "Promotion of judges, whenever such a system exists, should be based on objective factors, in particular ability, integrity and experience."

DAP national chairman Lim Kit Siang asked whether Lamin was suggesting that the Attorney-General should arrest and prosecute Raja Aziz for sedition or treason.

"What Malaysia lacks is a robust tradition of vigorous, trenchant but legitimate criticism of judicial decisions and conduct to maintain public confidence in the judiciary."