

15/11/2001

Dr Mahathir lauds PBS' decision to rejoin the BN

Kamarul Yunus

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday lauded Parti Bersatu Sabah's (PBS) decision to rejoin the Barisan Nasional (BN), describing it as a "good thing".

"I think it is a good thing... the more the merrier," he told newsmen at MIC president and Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu's Deepavali open house in Kuala Lumpur.

However, Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman, said the BN would have to consider the PBS' credentials and sincerity first before accepting it into the coalition.

"Once bitten, twice shy," he said, referring to PBS' pullout from the BN on the eve of the 1990 general election to team up with the now disbanded Parti Melayu Semangat 46.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on the PBS supreme council's decision on Tuesday night to submit an application to rejoin the ruling coalition as soon as possible.

Asked on his previous statement that he would never accept PBS back into the BN fold, Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said he was a forgiving person. "You might remember I said that I would never accept Tengku Razaleigh but I'm a very forgiving kind of a person," he said, referring to the readmission of the former Semangat 46 president and his followers into Umno.

On whether the rotation system for Chief Minister's post in Sabah would be abolished if the PBS rejoined the BN, Dr Mahathir said that was up to the Sabahans to decide. "It depends on the people of Sabah. We recommended a formula and the formula has its benefits. We are aware of the PBS' stand. The party does not favour a rotation... it's OK. Let them think about it," he added.

Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said although the party welcomed the PBS' move to seek readmission to the BN, it must be cautious to ensure that history would not repeat itself. "In my opinion, the BN must study carefully and take a look at the existing PBS leadership before accepting them as coalition members," he said.

Samy Vellu, when asked for his comments, said the MIC would always welcome a strong party into the BN to strengthen the coalition. "This reflects unity among the Sabah people to come together to face any eventuality. I have always been asking (PBS president Datuk Seri Joseph) Pairin to come back into the coalition's fold," he said.

Asked whether BN members should remain cautious to prevent the PBS from back-stabbing the BN again, Samy Vellu said: "The PM, as a leader, always has his own ways. We should listen to the PM because he is our leader. He may have reasons (to welcome the PBS to rejoin the BN)," he said.

(END)