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Dr M to give PBS application to join BN favourable consideration

Abdullah Ahmad; Joniston Bangkuai

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight said he would "consider favourably" the application of Parti Bersatu Sabah to rejoin the Barisan Nasional which it left 11 years ago on the eve of the general election to team up with Parti Melayu Semangat 46.

Semangat 46 has been disbanded and its members have rejoined Umno.

In a telephone conversation with the New Straits Times just before dinner with Moroccan Prime Minister Abderrahmane El Youssoufi at Seri Perdana in Putrajaya, Dr Mahathir acknowledged that he had known for some time the intention of PBS to return to the fold.

He sounded happy and stated "it is good news but I will have to study carefully the pros and cons. However, I can assure PBS leaders and members their application will be considered favourably".

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik also told the NST: "I am glad PBS shares the consistent BN view that national interest and unity must come above everything else.

"It is comforting to know that now PBS is willing to sacrifice smaller interests for larger national well-being and solidarity and cohesion."

In Kota Kinabalu today, the party's supreme council decided that it would submit an application to get into the coalition as soon as possible.

PBS president Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan said the supreme council took into account all the views, advice and reminders by delegates who took part in a debate before arriving at the decision.

"We considered all the feedback from the delegates before arriving at the decision," Pairin told a Press conference after the meeting.

Nineteen delegates participated in the debate and all except the delegate from Balung and the representative from the youth wing supported the re-entry of the party into the BN.

The party's three deputy presidents - Dr Maximus Ongkili, Dr Yee Moh Chai and Pengiran Aliuddin Pengiran Tahir - also voiced their support.

The decision was made at the council meeting held immediately after delegates to the party's 16th annual congress debated whether it should apply to rejoin the BN.

Pairin said the council also took into account the statement by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi that the BN would consider any application by the PBS to rejoin the BN.

"We thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his positive response."

Pairin gave an assurance that the PBS will continue to protect the interests of its members, supporters as well as the people of Sabah.

"The decision was made in the interests of the State and the people," he said, adding that the PBS had to reassess its role to ensure its relevancy.

The PBS decision to apply to rejoin the BN did not come as a surprise as its leaders have of late been making reconciliatory statements when commenting on issues affecting the country.

If accepted back into the BN fold, it would be a homecoming for the PBS as it was a member of the coalition from 1985 until it abruptly left in 1990.