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PBS application today (HL)

Shamsul Akmar; Ramlan Said

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Top Parti Bersatu Sabah leaders will submit their application to rejoin Barisan Nasional tomorrow.

PBS president Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan and his deputy Dr Maximus Ongkili will hand over the application to the BN.

Ongkili, who confirmed this today, said the PBS hoped that its application would be given favourable consideration by the coalition.

"It is time for unity and reconciliation ... let the past be a lesson for us to move forward together," he said in a telephone interview.

The development came just one day after the PBS supreme council gave its approval to seek re-admission into the coalition.

BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, asked about PBS' intention to rejoin the BN, said he was willing to consider the matter as he is "a forgiving kind of person".

The Prime Minister was speaking to reporters at MIC president and Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu's Deepavali open house at the Chung Hwa Independent Secondary School in Jalan Ipoh here.

He acknowledged he had once stated that the party would never be accepted into BN's fold again after leaving the coalition on the eve of the 1990 general election.

"At moments like that, I made such statements. But you may remember I have also said that I will never accept Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (former president of the now-defunct Parti Melayu Semangat 46) in but he is with us now. I am a very forgiving kind of person."

The PBS abruptly quit the BN before the 1990 general election to join the then opposition coalition led by Semangat 46.

The act was described by BN leaders then as a "stab in the back".

Dr Mahathir also described PBS' intention to rejoin BN as a good thing to happen. "The more the merrier," he quipped.

However, he said, the BN would consider PBS' credentials and sincerity.

"We do not want to see what the Malays say `banana which fruits twice' (pisang berbuah dua kali)."

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether the rotation system for the Sabah Chief Minister's post would be affected with PBS' admission. He said the fate of the system rested with the Sabah people, who would decide what was best for them.

Asked what the PBS expected from the BN after the application had been submitted, Ongkili said: "We understand that our application will go through the normal process and will be discussed among members of the coalition. We hope that the application will be processed quickly so that we can then move on and start working closely for the benefit of the people of Sabah."

It was learnt that the move by PBS to rejoin BN had been discussed extensively between the two sides.

Asked what made the PBS finally decide to apply to rejoin the BN, Ongkili said: "To ensure that we can work together well, we must build a strong foundation. A strong foundation cannot be built overnight ... otherwise, it can easily crumble."

The PBS has, since the 1994 State election, been the sole opposition party in the Sabah legislative assembly and its representation had been eroded by continuous defections to the BN.