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(The NST diary)

DKL

Once political foes, they are good friends again

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is a lucky man: first the Sept 11 incidents and, now, Sabah's only opposition party, PBS, wants to rejoin the BN.

The PBS's homecoming has no doubt demoralised the opposition. These events have strengthened Dr Mahathir's hand.

Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan realises he serves his party best when deciding to put the interest of the nation above all else.

To err is human, to blame the other party is politics. Pairin has apologised for his perfidy. In politics, there are no permanent friends or enemies. A good politician knows when to complain, compliment, compromise, apologise and adapt.

Watching Dr Mahathir and Pairin on television was almost like old times. All that may seem a long time ago, but Pairin has now re-dedicated himself to a vision of Malaysia's future - prosperity for all.

No one race can progress in isolation, not even the majority race. While it is natural for people to gravitate towards and congregate among their own ethnic brethren, they should not separate themselves from other communities for Malaysia is a multi-religious and cultural nation.

The political outlook - if the economy holds and even if several vulnerabilities remain - is relatively good.

Pairin and his friends must have felt that Dr Mahathir has a safe pair of hands, having already demonstrated this over the last two decades.

Dr Mahathir, ever the pragmatist, will have to deal with the Islamic extremists who want to be the religion's only voice and, equally important, the nagging question of transparency.