

Pairin grateful to Dr Mahathir

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'New chapter for Sabah and Malaysia'

KOTA KINABALU: Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) president Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan said he is grateful to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for forgiving him by allowing his party back into the Barisan Nasional fold.

"I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to Barisan and in particular Dr Mahathir as Barisan chairman for having given our application a positive consideration and approval, and for forgiving me, in particular," he told reporters at his house here yesterday.

He also thanked Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for his part in paving the way for PBS' readmission.

"I have not forgotten those who worked behind the scenes to smoothen the whole process," he added.

Pairin said PBS' readmission would mark a new chapter for Sabah and Malaysia, adding that much time had been used before this for politicking.

"Now the time has come for us to put our shoulders to the wheel of development and work together," he said, noting that resolving rural poverty and problems related to the uneven distribution of wealth and income were among the party's priorities.

Surrounded by almost all of his 40 PBS supreme council members, Pairin said he felt relieved after getting word of the Barisan's decision to readmit PBS.

"I think many people in Sabah are also relieved as well. Many people had been asking when the decision would be made after we submitted our application to Dr Mahathir on Nov 13 last year," he added.

To a question on what assurance PBS could give to Barisan that it would not pull out from the coalition again, Pairin said the party would not have made its application if it had such an intention.

On the absence of an opposition in the state, he said this should not arise as PBS was continuing with its work while other component parties have also been critical of the Government.

"There are also other opposition parties as well so there is actually still a check and balance," Pairin said.

On Barisan's two-year rotation of the chief minister's post which PBS had opposed, Pairin said the party was maintaining its view on the matter and this was known among the Barisan leadership.