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Abdullah: PBS can help BN make clean sweep

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KOTA KINABALU, Sun. - Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi says Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) can play a significant role in ensuring a clean sweep for the Barisan Nasional in the State in the next general election.

The Deputy Prime Minister said the result of the Gaya parliamentary by-election showed that PBS could deliver a landslide victory for the coalition.

Abdullah believed all the "black areas" in Sabah had become "white areas" following PBS' re-admission to BN early this year.

For example, he said, the Inanam State constituency, which was re-garded as a black area, had become a white area following BN's victory in Gaya.

Inanam lies within the Gaya parliamentary constituency.

"I am confident that with the return of PBS to the BN, the coalition will win all the seats in Sabah in the next general election," he said at the opening of the PBS 17th annual congress at the Hongkod Koisaan near here.

Present were Chief Minister and State BN chairman Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, BN secretary-general Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat, PBS president Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan and Sabah BN party leaders.

The congress, attended by more than 2,000 delegates and observers, was the first for the PBS since it rejoined BN.

Abdullah, who is BN deputy chairman, said he supported PBS' readmission to the coalition because unity was vital to develop the State.

"What we want is unity in BN to bring progress to the people," he said, adding that even the Opposition had emulated the BN by forming its own "Barisan".

Abdullah said Sabah had vast tracts of land suitable for agriculture, which should be exploited to create new wealth for the State and the people.

The Federal Government was prepared to provide allocations to develop the agricultural sector in the State, he said.

At a Press conference later, Abdullah said co-operation among the BN parties in Sabah was very good, as proven during the Gaya by-election.

On whether PBS would be given a role in government, he said this needed to be discussed with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

On the revelation by the Election Commission that certain individuals had tried to vote in the Gaya by-election using forged identity cards, Abdullah hoped that such cases would not recur.

"Every effort must be taken to eliminate the phantom voters. Otherwise, the integrity of the Election Commission will be questioned."

He also said the Government would only consider granting permanent resident status to foreigners who had been in the country for more than 10 years.

"Citizenship cannot be given automatically," he said when asked about the possibility that illegal immigrants who had been in Sabah for decades might apply for citizenship.