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PBS back in BN fold (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - After 12 years in the Opposition, Parti Bersatu Sabah today became the 14th member of the Barisan Nasional after its application to rejoin the coalition was accepted.

The BN supreme council today gave its full endorsement for the re-entry at a meeting chaired by BN chairman and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The admission also marked the "demise" of the Opposition wakil rakyat in the Sabah Legislative Assembly, where PBS is represented by eight assemblymen. In the Dewan Rakyat, PBS has three MPs.

Speaking at a Press conference after the two-hour meeting, Dr Mahathir said the decision to re-admit PBS was unanimous and free of any condition from both sides.

"There is no condition imposed either by PBS or BN. This means they have to abide by party regulations and should not expect any rewards. "But BN has the right to make decisions for the party and its members."

The BN component parties are Umno, MCA, MIC, Gerakan, Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Sarawak (PBB), Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), Sarawak National Party (SNAP), Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS), People's Progressive Party (PPP), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP), United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Organisation (Upko) and Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS).

PBS president Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan submitted the party's application to re-join BN to Dr Mahathir last November.

It was without any condition.

The party joined BN on June 6, 1986, a year after it was formed but left the coalition a few days before polling day in the 1990 general election.

Asked of PBS' role in the Sabah Government and at the Federal level, and whether its MPs and assemblymen would be given posts, Dr Mahathir reiterated the admission was without any conditions.

"We promise nothing and we also do not discount any possibilities."

Pressed whether the goodies for the party would be "awarded" later as there had been talk Pairin would be made Sabah Deputy Chief Minister, the Prime Minister said: "When they come, we'll talk about it. At the moment, it is just speculation."

On whether problems could be expected over seat allocation in the next general election especially now that PBS is in BN, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't expect anything. BN gets the support of the majority, we cannot get the support of everybody."

To a suggestion that the three Sabah Kadazandusun-based parties should merge because all of them are now in BN, Dr Mahathir replied the decision was up to them.

On whether today's decision would lead to the scrapping of the rotation system for the Sabah Chief Minister's post, Dr Mahathir said: "That was not discussed at all."

The rotation system among the Muslim Bumiputera, non-Muslim Bumiputera (Kadazandusun) and Chinese was introduced in 1994 after BN took over the State from PBS.

Under the power-sharing system, leaders of the three main communities rotate to be Chief Minister for a two-year term.

It was modified last March where Umno, the dominant partner in the State BN Nasional Government, would hold the Chief Minister's post alternatively

with a leader from the non-Muslim Bumiputera and Chinese communities.

Asked whether BN was confident there would be no repeat of the "stab in the back" incident which saw PBS deserting the coalition just a few days before the 1990 general election, Dr Mahathir replied: "I don't have a crystal ball that can foretell things. I am an ordinary person, sometimes things happen, I don't know."

Dr Mahathir said the supreme council also discussed applications to join the coalition from three other political parties - the Indian Progressive Front (IPF), Malaysian Indian Muslim Congress (Kimma) and Malaysian Punjabi Party.

On IPF's application, Dr Mahathir said the meeting failed to arrive at a consensus with MIC once again extending an offer for the party to join it.

The Prime Minister said BN would study how IPF could contribute but not as a coalition member.

He said the applications by Kimma and Malaysian Punjabi Party were not agreed upon.

Dr Mahathir said the meeting also discussed a proposal for the BN Youth and Wanita chiefs to be appointed to the supreme council.

"We felt the proposal should be referred to the component parties. At the same time, we feel the inclusion of one or two other members of the Youth and Wanita wings should also be considered."

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