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PM: Merger good for BN (HL)

Deborah Loh; Sajahan Waheed

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The proposed merger of MCA and Gerakan will be good for the Barisan Nasional and both parties should be allowed to work out the details of the plan without interference, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

The BN chairman, speaking today after launching Galeria Sri Perdana, the official residence of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad which has been turned into a museum, said the merger would strengthen the 14-member coalition.

"It is a good idea," he said of the proposal announced by MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting and Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik on Thursday.

"Just don't leave the BN," he added in jest.

"We should leave it to them to see how they will manage it."

Abdullah said the two largest Chinese-based parties in the coalition would have to decide on details such as the status of Gerakan's non-Chinese members, and which party to be dissolved.

The proposal was announced by Ong and Dr Lim in separate speeches at the MCA-Gerakan unity dinner in Alor Star.

They had said a merger was possible since both parties had been discussing long-term co-operation to strengthen their position in the Chinese community.

The merger, they said, would not undermine Umno and the other BN parties, and that it was mooted to enhance BN unity.

Yesterday, various BN leaders said a merger would benefit the BN, but cautioned that it had to be done sincerely and only after careful planning.

Dr Lim, speaking after chairing the weekly Gerakan central committee meeting at Menara PGRM today, said there would be no rush and that he did not foresee the merger taking place before the next general election.

The proposed merger has received the endorsement of leaders of both parties in Penang and Negri Sembilan.

Penang MCA deputy chairman Datuk Koay Kar Huah said the Chinese community and BN stood to benefit from it while Penang Gerakan secretary Datuk Dr Teng Hock Nan said it would be good for all Malaysians.

Negri Sembilan MCA deputy chairman Datuk Dr Yeow Chai Thiam described the plan as "ambitious, courageous and wise".

He said it would herald a new beginning for both parties.

Negri Gerakan chairman Datuk Woo Ah Lek said the idea was nothing new as both sides had in the past discussed ways to enhance co-operation.