

BN mulls new multi-racial group
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Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has mooted the idea of creating a new group within Barisan Nasional to allow people to directly join the ruling coalition as members.

Officiating the annual Gerakan congress in Kuala Lumpur this morning, the prime minister and BN chairperson revealed that he has raised the proposal at the last BN supreme council meeting.

gerakan agm 111008 stand.jpg "There are people who don't want to be members of a component party but they like BN, so I proposed at the last BN meeting the creation of a group who are direct members of BN," he told a 2,000-crowd at the Gerakan event.

Elaborating, Abdullah cited examples of Malays who prefer a multi-racial party and do not want to join Umno or its rival PAS, both Malay-based party.

"Gerakan wants to be multi-racial but it has not become what it should be," said Abdullah as he turned to Gerakan president Dr Koh Tsu Koon and told the latter "you have not achieved the purpose" of why the party was founded.

Gerakan, although multi-racial in constitution, is Chinese-based in reality.

The premier also said he did not believe Gerakan will leave BN after calls from the party grassroots to do so in protest against the racialist policies of Umno.

First step to single BN multi-racial party?

Abdullah's proposal today is seen as a BN way to counter the surging popularity received by opposition alliance Pakatan Rakyat, which is led by multi-racial PKR headed by Anwar Ibrahim.

It also came in the wake of a survey which showed that about 70 percent of Malaysians are not in favour of BN's racial affirmative policies and among them, 65 percent are Malays.

The new group suggested by Abdullah will allow BN supporters to join the coalition without having to be a member of its 13 component parties, led by the race-based Umno, MCA and MIC.

gerakan agm 111008 abdullah pc02.jpg However, the structure of this proposed new group - whether it will be a supporters' club or an official party - remain sketchy as Abdullah said it is subject to discussion.

Asked at a press conference later whether the new proposal signals the failure of several multi-racial based BN parties like Gerakan and PPP, Abdullah said "it is left to your interpretation".

He said the proposal will serve as an additional option for people who are keen in politics, adding that people can still join the current BN party like Umno for instance if they so wish.

"It's an idea that I have floated, it's something that you must think about. I know for a fact that there are many who support BN, who want to be closer to BN, want to have an opportunity to interact with BN leaders and requesting BN to do this and that.

"I sense that if they can be given an opportunity to be closer to us in a kind of formal setting, then perhaps letting them be direct BN members might be a good beginning. It could also become a very important reform for us to undertake," he said.

Nevertheless, Abdullah remained non-committal when asked on whether the new group will be the first step for a single BN multi-racial party but described it as an "experiment"

"Maybe in the future they want changes or in the future they say no, no, no, we want to go on as we are, we don't know (how it will be) but we must try," said the premier.

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