

Najib's move seen as attempt to make BN more inclusive
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KUALA LUMPUR – Politicians and analysts agree that the Barisan Nasional decision yesterday to approve "associate" and "affiliate" membership would make the coalition more inclusive.

But the approval came with certain guidelines which the Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak would explain in full in due course, said LDP president V.K. Liew.

The direct membership which the Barisan Supreme Council allowed would also serve as a new platform for youth to get a feel of politics, he added.

"What is important is that all the component parties agreed to it to make Barisan more inclusive," he told Bernama here on Saturday.

One condition already spelled out is that anyone wishing to be an associate or affiliate member must not belong to any party, Liew said.

Another condition is that only a member of a component party can be a Barisan candidate in an election.

"It's more like a stop gap, for them (the direct members) to touch the political heart beat. Probably after two or three years, if they feel that politics is the way for them, or they want to become a candidate (in an election), they will join a component party," he said.

Direct membership was proposed by Najib in February this year, after which a committee was formed to study the pros and cons chaired by Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein.

Political observers recalled that Dr Mahathir Mohamad allowed two candidates without a party to stand under the Barisan banner in the 1990s.

(Both won - Datuk Billy Abit Joo in Hulu Rejang and Datuk Joseph Salang in Julau.)

Political analyst Dr Sivamurugan Pandian of Universiti Sains Malaysia said that direct membership would allow Barisan to reach out to more people, particularly the youth, who like Barisan but have some reservations about joining any of the component parties.

"Barisan is on the right path to attract more members. The uniqueness of direct membership can attract more youth, especially those who registered as voters after the 2008 General Election, Sivamurugan said.

"Just look at Kelab Penyokong PAS (PAS Supporters Club). They have easily captured 20,000 members -- all of them non-Muslims," he added.

Gerakan president Dr Koh Tsu Koon said the party supported in principle the admission into Barisan of NGOs as associate members and individuals as affiliate members in line with the inclusive spirit of 1Malaysia.

"We view this as a positive initiative and a step forward to attract more talent and support for Barisan to

become even more effective to serve the people of Malaysia and move forward together to achieve Vision 2020," he said in a statement here Saturday.

Koh said Gerakan also supported the new move with the understanding that rules and regulations on the rights, roles and responsibilities of these two new membership categories will soon be deliberated by the Barisan Supreme Council.

A Cabinet reshuffle is also another way Najib is trying to strengthen the ruling coalition.

The talk is the reshuffle, expected by next month, will enable him to form a strong team to help him implement the economic and transformation policies he has put in place and carry the Government into the 13th general election next year.

According to The Star, the impending reshuffle will not be as major as Najib's first reshuffle shortly after he came in as Prime Minister, nor as minor as the one last year.

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