

**BN welcomes three new affiliate members**  
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**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 16 — Barisan Nasional (BN) has welcomed three new affiliate members into its ranks in a bid to strengthen the ruling coalition ahead of a general election expected soon.

The groups are Gabungan Wawasan Generasi Felda, Persatuan Bekas Anggota Kemas Malaysia and Persatuan Kontraktor Melayu Malaysia — all key demographics for Umno in constituencies across the Malay peninsula.

When announcing their memberships, BN chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak said last night the groups had gone through a stringent vetting process by the pact's management committee.

He added that BN had received a total of 11 applications from various groups.

"We are still processing the others," he told reporters at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here after chairing a BN supreme council meeting.

BN's latest move appears to be its strategic attempt to consolidate its support among the rural Malay community, a key vote bank for the ruling pact in the coming polls.

In November 2010, BN agreed to amend its constitution to introduce direct associate and affiliate membership as part of its efforts to draw more support for the coalition.

At the press conference, Najib also announced the extension of the deadline for his administration's Bantuan Rakyat 1 Malaysia (BR1M) initiative to March 15.

"Applicants can still appeal until March 15 and further to that, the deadline can be extended if needed until the aid reaches all of those who qualify," he said.

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