

PM: Workers will end up losers

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Workers will stand to lose if union leaders do not remain neutral and get involved in any political party, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said if unionists were involved in political parties, they would not be able to fully concentrate and carry out their responsibilities as workers' representatives.

"The workers will end up being the losers because they will not get a full commitment from their leaders," he said, adding that "they should not use their positions to gain political influence".

Dr Mahathir was com-

menting on a *New Straits Times* report on Friday which said Malaysian Trades Union Congress president Zainal Rampak had joined Semangat 46.

The report said Encik Zainal joined the opposition party two months ago despite pleas by some of his peers that he should remain apolitical as leader of the nation's private sector labour organisation.

Encik Zainal was admitted as a member of the Semangat 46 through the party's Ampang Jaya division.

Selangor Semangat 46 chief Datuk Harun Idris had said several other union leaders had also indi-

cated interest in joining the party and he expected them to make a decision soon.

"I regret that he (Encik Zainal) has used his position as MTUC president to get involved in politics. He has put his own interest above the workers'," Dr Mahathir said when approached by reporters at his Hari Raya open house at Seri Perdana.

"We (Umno) have never invited unionists to join the party because we feel their involvement in politics will interfere with their duties in the trade unions."

Asked whether Encik Zainal's decision to join Semangat 46 would create an

opportunity for the party to gain votes from the labour force, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know if they can. The workers can make a decision for themselves on whom to vote."

He also said MTUC leaders had political interests and it was difficult to say whether whatever they did was for the betterment of the workers or to fulfil their own political needs.

"We cannot say that their actions are purely to fight for workers' rights because they have political interests as well."

"If the workers allow themselves to be used by these leaders, they will end up losers," he added.