

Barisan won't accept outsiders

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By K.H. Lim

LABUAN, Sun. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today ruled out the possibility of any successful independent candidate for the Labuan constituency being allowed to join the Barisan Nasional.

The Barisan Nasional chairman made this declaration as there has been speculation that any victorious independent candidate would be accepted into the coalition.

Barisan Nasional's Abdul Mulok Awang Damit is defending his seat against independents Harris Haji Annuar Tan @ David Tan and Haji Zaini Mohamed Isa.

Speaking at a meet-the-people session here, Dr Mahathir said the only MP for Labuan which would get the attention of the Federal Government would be the Barisan Nasional MP and not any independent MP.

Also present at the gathering held at the Labuan Community Hall were Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid, Labuan Chief Administrator Haji Abdul Rahman Haji Ali and Labuan Umno divisional chief Isli Haji Siput.

The Prime Minister had yesterday obtained pledges from PBS and Usno that they would expel any of their member who stood against Barisan Nasional candidates.

The pledges were made by PBS president Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan and his Usno counter-part,

Tun Datu Haji Mustapha Datu Harun, after a two-hour meeting with Dr Mahathir in Kota Kinabalu.

Dr Mahathir hinted that he would appoint Encik Isli to a post in the Government after the general election. Encik Isli had earlier been tipped to be the candidate and it was rumoured that he was not supportive of Encik Mulok.

Addressing the crowd earlier, Encik Isli pledged unqualified support for the party's candidate and urged them to return Encik Mulok.

Dr Mahathir told the crowd that he appreciated the sacrifices of Encik Isli in toeing the party line and that of his supporters in backing Encik Mulok.

He then declared that no independent MP for Labuan, if elected, would be allowed to join Umno or any other component party of Barisan Nasional.

"I urge you to vote Encik Mulok because only a Barisan Nasional MP for Labuan can enjoy close co-operation of the Federal Government.

"An independent MP, if elected, will be a lone voice in Parliament and will not have the attention of the Government.

"Encik Mulok is our man and we will definitely have an ear for him.

"As for Encik Isli, he will also have a place. This is my promise to you," he said to cheers from the packed hall.

Later, Encik Mulok said that he

was confident of winning the seat with a bigger majority now that Dr Mahathir has given his campaign a boost and Encik Isli declaring support for his candidacy.

"The Prime Minister's visit has turned the tide and this is evident from the turn-out this morning as well as the response from the crowd to his statements."

Encik Mulok won the seat in the 1986 general election as an independent, beating Encik Isli who was the then Barisan Nasional candidate, in a five-cornered contest by a majority of 183 votes.

Encik Isli later confirmed in a separate interview that he was supposed to be the candidate and that it was an 11th hour decision to field the incumbent who had since joined Umno.

"I have even printed posters but the party decided on the last day to retain the incumbent.

"As a party man, I will support Encik Mulok. In fact, I have already begun organising *ceramah* for him.

"Some of my supporters have asked me to contest as an independent but I stood firm in refusing.

"Some of them have even called me a coward but I have to stay firm for the sake of the party," Encik Isli said.

He was also glad that Dr Mahathir had categorically denied any chance of an independent being allowed to join the Barisan Nasional.