

ALL-OUT CAMPAIGN

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We'll fight PBS to the end, says Mahathir

KOTA BARU, Thurs. — The Barisan Nasional will launch an all-out political assault against Parti Bersatu Sabah through selected independent and Akar candidates in the general election, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the Barisan would provide assistance to these candidates and fight the PBS "to the end" now that it had withdrawn from the coalition.

"We will support Akar and the independent candidates, and conduct information campaigns in Sabah," he said.

"We are concerned about the seats being contested by PBS and the independents it has fielded against Usno. However, I am confident that Usno will retain its six seats."

The Barisan chairman was speaking at a press conference after a closed-door meeting with Kelantan Barisan candidates at the state Umno office here.

He said PBS president and Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan's action would not benefit Sabah as it had strained the state-federal relations and made it hard for co-operation.

"This is our message to the Sabah people. We do not blame them but the PBS for purposely poisoning their minds and discrediting the many contributions the Federal Government," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was surprised to find that PAS was willing to work with PBS through Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah in view of Datuk Pairin's efforts to finish off Usno and Tun Datu Mustapha after having destroyed Berjaya.

"We shall see who will gain or lose," he said.

Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghafar Baba said in Kota Kinabalu yesterday that the Barisan would support five independent and an Akar (Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat) candidates, besides the six Usno candidates.

The independent candidates are Lamsil Hamidor (Kota Belud), Ridi Alawangsa (Jambangan), Mohamed Zahari Mohamed Zinin (Kimanis), Osman Mohamad (Tawau) and Saibon Abpalan (Bandau). The Akar candidate is

Datuk Mark Koding (Kinabalu).

Dr Mahathir said the Barisan would also explain how the Sabah people would lose out because of Datuk Pairin's decision to pull out of Barisan.

He said if the government in Sabah did not have cordial relations with the Federal Government, it would be difficult for the Federal Government to extend co-operation to the state.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was aware that PBS had been receiving assistance from certain foreign organisations but was not planning any action against the party.

He would not, however, identify these foreign groups.

He said the PBS being very rich, could now help Angkatan which would also become well-off.

Dr Mahathir said it was difficult for the Government to approve PBS' request to set up a special TV station because this might be used for promoting Christianity.

Since the Semangat 46 manifesto was similar to that of the PBS, he said, Tengku Razaleigh naturally supported the request for a TV station for Sabah.

"Whether he supports this or not, I cannot say anything if Ku Li becomes the Prime Minister," he said.

On Tengku Razaleigh's call for the setting up of a royal commission of inquiry to investigate the BMF affair, Dr Mahathir said it was a "criminal matter" and not something to be resolved by a royal commission.

He said the case would have to be investigated by the relevant authorities.

"We already had a committee of inquiry chaired by Tan Sri Ahmad Noordin and comprising (accountant) Ramli Ibrahim and (lawyer) Chooi Mun Sou. Now, Tan Sri Noordin and Chooi are clearly on Ku Li's side and we have doubts over the committee's impartiality," he said.

On the Barisan chances in Kelantan, Dr Mahathir said he found that it could win and form the state government again.

"It looks like we are headed for victory unless a disaster occurs. It is the same for parliamentary seats. Possibly we will get the majority of seats."

Earlier, Dr Mahathir, accompanied by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasimah, addressed about 300 former state opposition leaders and members behind closed doors at the Mentri Besar's official residence here.