

31/07/2001

Umno committed to BN, says Dr M

KOTA KINABALU, Mon. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Umno had nothing to do with those who intended to contest as independent candidates in the forthcoming Sarawak State election.

The Prime Minister said Umno was committed to the Barisan Nasional.

"Umno does not stab its partners in the back, even if we have sympathy for any group ... we will always stand up for BN," Dr Mahathir said at a Press conference after opening the Upko seventh annual congress here.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president and BN chairman, was asked about reports quoting Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud as saying that there were rumours of Umno backing certain quarters to contest against him in the next Sarawak State election.

Taib, who is Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) president, was quoted as saying that talk of Umno backing independent candidates to contest against him in his Asajaya seat was "a political lie".

Dr Mahathir said Umno's support for other parties in the BN coalition was evident during the Likas by-election on July 21 when its candidate, Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) president Datuk Yong Teck Lee, retained the seat.

"In the Likas by-election, Umno came out strongly to support the candidate although he is not from Umno and is a Chinese. That makes no difference because Umno is committed to BN.

"The person who wins is not important... it is the BN winning that is important," he said.

On the BN victory in Likas, Dr Mahathir said the coalition did well and he was happy that BN achieved a bigger majority compared to the 1999 State election.

Yong retained the seat with a 7,541-vote majority compared to the 4,962 majority in 1999.

The by-election was held following an Election Court ruling on June 8 that the 1999 election for the constituency was null and void. The court also ruled that the 1998 electoral roll used in the constituency was illegal as it contained the names of non-citizens.

The Prime Minister also said those who claimed there were phantom voters on the electoral roll should have protested before the election was held.

"If you think there are phantom voters, you should make a protest from the beginning and not when you lose the election. If they win they will keep quiet because if they complain there will be a by-election.

"So it is not the phantom voters, (but) just because they lost the election," Dr Mahathir said.

In the election petition filed by Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) candidate Dr Chong Eng Leong soon after the 1999 State election in Likas, he claimed that the 1998 electoral roll contained names of non-citizens.

Dr Chong was defeated once again by Yong in the recent by-election which also saw Parti Keadilan Nasional's Liew Chin Jin and independent Joshua Kong contesting.

Asked about the low voter turnout during the recent by-election, Dr Mahathir said such a trend was common during by-elections.

"A lot of people feel even if we lose we will still be in the Government. This is an attitude which most people adopt during a by-election.

"Some believe we are going to win anyway even if they do not vote.

"Some could not be bothered because they are only interested in the general election when results determine who will form the Government... this is a common phenomenon."

Only 52.95 per cent of the 26,196 registered voters in Likas cast their votes.

(END)