

Umno division withdraws invitation to Mahathir

By NIK KHUSAIRI IBRAHIM
north@thestar.com.my

KANGAR: The Padang Besar Umno division has withdrawn its invitation to former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to open its annual general meeting.

Division chief Datuk Zahidi Zaihu Abidin said when the invitation was made the division was under the impression that "any respectable leader" could be invited to open such meetings.

He said this was based on precedents in the past, such as when former deputy Prime Minister Tun Musa Hitam was given the honour to open Umno meetings although he had left the Cabinet.

He added that heads of Barisan Nasional component par-

ties had also been sworn the honour to open Umno meetings in the past, including Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu (MIC), Tan Sri Chong Kah Kiat (Sabah's Liberal Democratic Party) and Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik (Gerakan).

The division was not aware that only ministers, mentris besar, supreme council members and division chiefs from Umno were allowed to open such meetings, Zahidi told a press conference here yesterday.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Seri Radzi Sheikh Ahmad had said recently that disciplinary action would be taken if the division persisted with its intention to invite Dr Mahathir.

Zahidi said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi would now be invited

to open the division's AGM on Aug 27.

"But we are going ahead with the *ceramah* where Dr Mahathir has been invited to give a speech," he said, adding that the division was not going against party guidelines.

He said the *ceramah* would be held at 10am on Aug 26 near Taman Berseri Indah.

"We do not want to disappoint Padang Besar folks who have been waiting to meet Dr Mahathir for a long time," he said.

Zahidi said it was not proper to restrain Dr Mahathir from airing his views;

"Even former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew is still given the chance to express his views," he added.

• Follow rules: Page 18