

PM hints at fielding hopefuls under coalition's banner

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KUCHING: The Prime Minister has not ruled out the possibility of fielding direct Barisan Nasional candidates in the 13th general election again.

"Wait and see. When the time comes (it'll be revealed). I don't want to jump the gun," Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak told a press conference here yesterday after meeting state leaders.

Candidates standing under the Barisan banner have to be a member of one of its component parties but incumbent Hulu Rajang MP Billy Abit Joo created history when he became the first partyless Barisan candidate to contest in the 1995 GE.

He was given a year to decide which component party to join as there was no provision for anyone to be a Barisan member without belonging to a party in the coalition.

On whether candidates from parties that were not in Barisan but were Barisan-friendly would be fielded, Najib replied: "No, they will not be accepted".

He said only candidates who could be accepted by the *rakyat* would be chosen.

"In my visits to constituencies, I can see the response has been very encouraging. I think people have generally benefited from our transformation policies.

"The transformation, with the support of Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud will bring big changes to Sarawak," Najib said after a closed-door meeting with state Barisan leaders.

The meeting saw the attendance of all four presidents of Sarawak component parties Parti Pesaka Bersatu Bumiputera (PBB), Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS) and the Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP).

Mas Gading MP Datuk Dr Tiki Lafe, who is part of a breakaway group, the unofficial Barisan Nasional Supporters' Club, has in the past expressed his wish to be a Barisan candidate.

If direct Barisan candidates are allowed, Dr Tiki who is one of five SPDP MPs and state assemblymen who have left the party over disagreements with its leadership could be one of them.

Asked what his party would do if Dr Tiki was chosen as a direct Barisan candidate, SPDP president Tan Sri William Mawan said: "We will cross the bridge when we come to it."

SPDP has nominated Anthony Nogeh Gumbek, who is Sarawak Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority deputy general manager, as the candidate for Mas Gading.

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