

Appropriate for him to contest No 2 post: Dr M Ghafar for deputy president

NST 2 3 MAR 1987

TELUK INTAN, Sun. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba should contest the party's deputy presidency at the Umno general assembly on April 24.

He said that being the Deputy Prime Minister it was appropriate for Encik Ghafar to contest the No. 2 post. The Prime Minister added that Encik Ghafar had also been long in the party, holding the position of vice-president for 25 years.

Encik Ghafar has so far not said whether he would contest the post although he has been nominated for it.

Opening the delegates' meeting of the Pasir Salak Umno division at the town hall here, the Prime Minister declared: "I support his nomination. The time has come for him to do so (contest the deputy presidency)."

Dr Mahathir said that even though Encik Ghafar could have contested the deputy presidency in the past based on his experience in Umno, he did not do so because he did not want to create problems.

The Prime Minister and Umno president added that he

could not support the nominations of other leaders for the post because "they say one thing when in the Government and another when outside. I cannot support party leaders who criticise Government policies that had been collectively decided upon."

It was appropriate for those who did not support Government policies to relinquish their posts, but they were reluctant to do so because of the benefits they enjoyed as Ministers and Deputy Ministers, he added.

"Others who really want to serve the party and people can go for the vice-presidents' post and they will get the support. There is no need for them to make wild accusations (against the Government or the party leadership)."

Dr Mahathir said he believed well-organised contests would be in line with the party's tradition. He said during the 1984 party elections, he had spoken out against any contest for the deputy presidency because it had already been filled (by Datuk Musa Hitam).

Apparently referring to Datuk Musa, the Prime Minister said at that time the deputy president appreciated his stand on the need to preserve party tradition. "However, today this person is angry over the same stand."

Dr Mahathir reminded party members that too much

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campaigning within a short period would only affect Umno's objective of serving the people. Such an unhealthy situation was evident in the present campaign with some leaders going all over the country to whip up support for their own benefit, he said.

He regretted that certain leaders were using the run-up to the party polls to criticise the Government. It was these same people who had, at other times, called on others to support the party. "If this is how we conduct our campaign, how are the people going to trust us?"

Dr Mahathir reiterated the need for the members to uphold party tradition. He said in line with this, the party presidency should be uncontested.

"I am not going to hold on to the post forever. But the people (who want it) have to be a bit patient. However, if they cannot wait, what can be done? We will have to fight."

The Prime Minister hoped the party elections would be held in a healthy manner. "We do not want Umno to collapse because if it does it would be difficult to rebuild it."

On his struggle in Umno, Dr Mahathir said he had to wait for 18 years before being selected to contest the Kota Star Selatan parliamentary seat in 1964.

"I became the Education Minister after 28 years in the party, Deputy Prime Minister after 34 years and Prime Minister after 36 years. I had to wait that long."

He said anyone destined for the top party post would one day reach the apex without having to struggle to the extent of creating disunity within the ranks.

He said he respected Encik Ghafar for his loyalty to the party and leadership and for his patience.

The Prime Minister pointed out that the people would trust a leader who was consistent in his views and actions.

On the practice of democracy, he said there must be certain limits to it.

"Unchecked democratic practices will only lead to unhealthy consequences, as evident in some Western countries."

He also expressed regret over an incident in Gua Musang recently where Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Haji Mohamad Yaacob was booed by some irresponsible people.

Dr Mahathir said the Menteri Besar had attended the opening ceremony of the Gua Musang Umno division meeting on an invitation.

"Such an unethical act has never happened before where an invited guest was booed by the host."

The Prime Minister also denied accusations that his criticism of some big powers had caused the drop in prices of Malaysia's commodities.