

'I trust my Deputy Premier' GHAFAR WILL BE No. 2 — WIN OR LOSE — MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed confidence that Encik Ghafar Baba will be elected Umno deputy president at the April 24 party election.

He said delegates should vote for Encik Ghafar as they had already shown their trust in him with the number of nominations they had given him.

Encik Ghafar, who was appointed Deputy Prime Minister after Datuk Musa's resignation on March 16 last year, was nominated by 76 divisions while Datuk Musa was nominated by 50.

Dr Mahathir also said that Encik Ghafar would remain as Deputy Prime Minister even if he lost the contest against incumbent Datuk Musa Hitam.

He added that it would still be proper for Encik Ghafar to hold the No. 2 post in the Government even if he failed in his bid as "there are people who hold no post in the party but have been given posts in the Government".

What was important was that he should also be able to work with the Prime Minister.

Encik Ghafar, he said, could

work with him.

"There should be a certain level of co-operation (between the Prime Minister and his deputy). Otherwise, you cannot work," said Dr Mahathir.

Speaking to reporters after launching the national-level civic consciousness day at Angkasapuri here, the Prime Minister said he chose Encik Ghafar to be his deputy because he has trust in Encik Ghafar.

He was commenting on Encik Ghafar's announcement yesterday that he would challenge Datuk Musa "after giving much thought to the existing situation in Umno".

Asked whether Encik Ghafar consulted him before announcing his candidacy, Dr Mahathir said: "That is not necessary. After all, I have

made statements supporting him."

He said being the Deputy Prime Minister, it was natural for Encik Ghafar to want to be Umno deputy president "as it would be better for a Deputy Prime Minister to also hold the post of deputy president".

When told that his decision today contradicted his earlier statement that the Deputy Prime Minister need not necessarily be the deputy president of the party, Dr Mahathir said: "True... but it is better".

On the confusion allegedly arising among those in the business as a result of different trade figures quoted by the different camps in Umno, the Prime Minister said there should not be any confusion

because such figures could be obtained from published records.

"What have such figures to do with who comes into power? The fact is if there is a balance in favour of a country, it will remain so even if another Government comes in."

He said figures were not only available from the Government, but could also be quoted by those with vested interests.

Asked about the different trade figures quoted by Datuk Musa and Encik Ghafar recently, he said Datuk Musa had to substantiate his figures.

On Datuk Musa's fear that the Proton Saga project would not succeed as it would not be able to reach the 100,000 units

per annum target, Dr Mahathir said:

"I don't want to talk about it. It is not worthwhile because people are not going to stick to facts. It will only create problems.

"I would like to know which car manufacturing company makes a profit within the first five years. If they can give a figure which is substantiated, I will reply to them," he said.

Asked about the prospects of the national car project, the Prime Minister said one should refer to the official records on its achievement to know the actual situation.

"I don't like to have this paper dialogue (where) you say yes and I say no because no side will be convinced. I suggest that the newspapers do research on this," he said.