

GHAFAR

STAYS:

DR M

He'll be DPM
even if he
loses, says
Prime Minister

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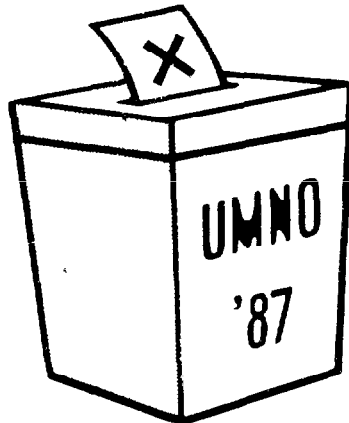
KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Encik Abdul Ghafar Baba will stay on as Deputy Prime Minister even if he loses in the contest for the Umno deputy presidency in the April 24 party elections.

The Prime Minister and Umno president said that although "it would be better" for Encik Ghafar to win the contest, it was not necessary for him to hold the party post to be Deputy Prime Minister.

He told reporters after launching a civic-consciousness campaign here that previously there were some Umno members who were appointed to the Cabinet despite their failure to win in party elections.

He said that what was more important than holding the (Deputy Prime Minister's) post was the person's ability to work with the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir added that he had confidence in Encik Ghafar. "I have trust in him. I chose him didn't I?"



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should be the DPM — P2**

Encik Ghafar, who is now a party vice-president, gave three reasons yesterday why he would challenge incumbent Datuk Musa Hitam for the Umno deputy president's post.

He said that they were his respect for the requests of several divisions, the trust placed in him by Dr Mahathir and his wish to ensure the smooth running of both the party and the Government.

Asked whether Encik Ghafar had

consulted him before announcing his decision to contest, Dr Mahathir said there was no need for him to do so.

"It was understood that he (Encik Ghafar) would contest. I had also made statements supporting him."

Dr Mahathir said it was only right that as Deputy Prime Minister, Encik Ghafar would also want to be Umno deputy president.

He said he expected delegates to elect Encik Ghafar.

He added that the large number of nominations which Encik Ghafar obtained from the divisions showed that the delegates would support him.

(Encik Ghafar received nominations from 75 Umno divisions against 50 for Datuk Musa and two for Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

(Encik Ghafar and Datuk Musa also received one nomination each for the presidency, Dr Mahathir 88 and Tengku Razaleigh 37).

Dr Mahathir said he would also be facing a contest for the party presidency.

When asked why he thought so, the Prime Minister asked: "Isn't it obvious to you? He (Tengku Razaleigh) has gone too far (to back down now)."

On possible repercussions among investors in view of factions in Umno presenting various figures to support claims of the country's economic performance, Dr Mahathir said:

"The figures are not only available from the Government but also anybody who has interest (in the matter).

"Businessmen shouldn't be bothered by these things. They should go by the party's records.

"Furthermore, the Government does not come in. It's a political party affair.

Dr Mahathir also defended the Proton Saga, a project that has been criticised by the Tengku Razaleigh-Datuk Musa faction.

He said there had not been a car-producer that had made profits in its first five years.

But, he said, the project had had a good record so far.

"Everything can be proven. It can be seen from records who is correct and who is not."