

# PM: Changes won't create life presidents

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday the amendments to the Societies Act will not create presidents for life in political parties as alleged by the Opposition.

He said the decision whether someone is president for life or not is in the hands of party members.

Winding up the debate on a Bill which seeks to amend the Societies Act, he said:

"If I die now or had died last January (when he went for a coronary bypass operation) people

may say that I was president for life. Unfortunately I did not die, so it cannot be ascertained whether I will be president for life or not," he said.

He denied an allegation by Mr Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Tanjong) that the amendments were aimed at protecting Umno.

"The amendments are for all political parties. Even in the present Umno there are some who have joined to wreck the party. If they or other non-members were to attend branch meetings, the party may face the same fate as the old Umno.

"Do we have to wait for something like this to recur before taking action? That would be an injustice to the more than million members in Umno.

"It would be a strange situation as the majority of members who want the party to go on smoothly cannot defend the party or voice support for it when the case goes to court, which would be an injustice to them," he said.

He said the amendments do not mean party members would be expelled at the whims and fancy of the party leadership as all par-

ties have procedures to follow.

He said it was the DAP which practised dictatorial leadership as anyone who opposed the secretary-general (Mr Lim) had to leave the party.

"We make the amendments to ensure the rights of members are protected as not only the leaders but the members also benefit from a healthy party," he said.

He chided Encik Ibrahim Ali (Semangat 46-Pasir Mas) for not debating on the amendments since his speech was filled with re-

ference to the MP for Gua Musang (Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah).

At this juncture Encik Ibrahim stood up and said he had spoken in defence of the MP for Gua Musang as many were accusing him of causing the split in Umno.

"I even advised him not to contest the Umno presidency but the contest still took place," said Encik Ibrahim.

To which the Prime Minister replied: "Then I do not see why you continue to support somebody who does not listen to you." This brought laughter in the House.