

# Dr M: Proof of commitment to democracy

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**KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs.** — The country's eighth general election is yet another proof of Malaysia's adherence to democracy, even if this may be disputed by certain quarters, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The announcement he made as Prime Minister today was proof of the Government's commitment to democracy, Dr Mahathir said, adding that elections were held in this country every five years as enshrined in the Constitution.

Some people viewed the general election as a media event, he said, adding that politicians like himself would be key performers as the election campaign intensified.

"The election is a significant event because the people will get their chance to exercise their rights to determine their leaders and the Government."

Speaking at an Umno dinner hosted for the Press tonight, Dr Mahathir said: "I will be the chief per-

former during the election campaign. Inevitably, in an election, there will be winners and losers.

"Every time we have an election, some members of the Opposition may win while some candidates of the ruling coalition may lose. This is inevitable.

"This is quite different from some countries where they declare themselves to be democratic republics. When they stage elections, only Government candidates emerge as the winners."

Speaking with a great deal of humour, Dr Mahathir drew the guests' attention to various interpretations on the Government's preparation for the general election and the accompanying speculation.

He joked that even his coronary bypass surgery in January last year and the resignation from politics of an Opposition politician were interpreted by some quarters as the Prime Minister's plans

geared to win the election.

As for the role of the Press in the country's democratic process, Dr Mahathir said he viewed their role as essential in providing feedback and disseminating information.

"I believe the majority of Pressmen are fair in their reports. There may be some black sheep in the profession but there's nothing one can do about it.

"I've lost, and won, in elections before. I hope that this time, if I win, the losers will accept the verdict."

He said there was Press freedom because of the Government's liberal approach. This, however, might be disputed by individuals or groups who were known for their anti-Government sentiments, he added.

Newspapers were free to support or criticise the Government, he said. "This is nothing strange because the same phenomenon is also seen in developed countries, such as Britain."

The fact that some new-

spapers chose to support the Government should not be seen that the media were Government-controlled, Dr Mahathir said, adding that some quarters concluded that the Government owned newspapers, which was not true.

He said there were newspapers which openly oppose the Government, but they were allowed to continue to be published.

"If the Government actually controls the Press, then this would not have been possible."

Among those who attended the dinner were a host of key Umno office-bearers. They included Wanita Umno chief and Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, deputy Wanita chief and Public Enterprises Minister Datuk Napsiah Omar, Umno vice-president Datuk Abdullah Badawi and Umno secretary-general and Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat.