

'Going to court is not the way to fight elections'

PM: Let the people decide

BY SABRY SHARIF AND K.H. LIM

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is leaving political matters to the people to decide, saying that taking them to court is not the way to fight elections.

Resorting to the courts to fight elections would only prevent people from discussing political matters, he said when responding to questions about a libel suit filed against him by Semangat 46 president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

"And that is not a brave thing to do," he said at a Press conference after chairing a meeting of the Umno supreme council at the party headquarters today.

Tengku Razaleigh filed a suit in the High Court today over Dr Mahathir's allegation that he (Tengku Razaleigh) had said that Semangat 46 would destroy Pas and DAP if it won the general election. (See report in P4).

Dr Mahathir said: "If the way of contesting in an election is through suits in court to silence people,

it is not being brave. We don't want to silence the people.

"If we want, we can (also) come up with all kinds of charges against our opponents, but we deliberately don't want to charge leaders of opposition parties because we want to leave it to the people to decide.

"So, if (he's) brave enough, we now leave it to the people. This ... asking the courts to prevent me from speaking out poses some problems."

Later, after meeting State Umno chiefs, when he was informed that the suit had already been filed in the High Court, he said: "Never mind. It's quite all right. I mean, it shows political bankruptcy.

"This is just a political thing as far as I can see.

"When you can't fight in the political arena, you try to silence your opponents through taking them to court.

"We are not going to do that kind of thing."

Dr Mahathir said his political opponents had made all kinds of statements against him but he had never taken any action against them.

Tengku Razaleigh has also named The New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) Berhad and Utusan Melayu (M) Berhad as the second and third defendants in his suit.

In his statement of claim, Tengku Razaleigh said the defendants had falsely and maliciously published or caused to be published the reports which appeared in the *Utusan Malaysia* and *Utusan Melayu* on Sept 21 and Oct 2, and in the *Berita Harian* and *New Straits Times* on Sept 22 and Sept 24 respectively.