

\$3bn, banking licence bait in bid for top post

A FORMER Finance Minister promised an allocation of \$3 billion and licence to set up banking operations to the Selangor Government if Umno members in the state would throw their support behind him for a top post in the party.

The same former minister also flaunted on-the-spot grants, a facility reserved only for the Prime Minister and his deputy, and various other means within the power of the ministry to increase his popularity among party members.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said such abuse of ministerial power for personal gains should have been scorned and rejected by all. Unfortunately, there were quarters who accepted this practice and even practised it themselves, he added.

"There are government offi-

cial and party leaders who still practise such abuses," he told Umno delegates when opening the party's general assembly in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, admitted to rampant bribery and power abuse among Malays within and outside the party in what Foreign Minister and party vice-president Datuk Abdullah Badawi described as a "premier reminder" that the Malay race, in condoning the bribes and power abuse, is letting history repeat itself.

The lesson in history, narrated by the Prime Minister in his address, discussed how the Malay sultanates, palace officials and the rakyat allowed themselves to be bought centuries ago, and in the end they sacrificed everything from their wealth to their independence to

the Portugese, the Dutch and the British colonial masters.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he fears that bribes and power abuse have once again found their roots in the modern Malay society.

"Some may rationalise that because it is a small bribe, it is okay. No, it is not okay. Bribes, big or small and in whatever form, will lead to the downfall of a nation. If we want to become a respected race, we will stay away from bribes and from power abuse for personal gains," he said.

The Prime Minister took a swipe at almost everybody for condoning such practices: there are those who made it with the help of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and used this money to buy their way into influential positions in the party; and there are those in government-owned

subsidiaries who used their important position and money to acquire a place in the party."

The bad example of the former Finance Minister has also found roots at the various levels in the party to the extent that certain Supreme Council nominees within the party handed out bribes in exchange for backing.

"Due to rampant bribery and vested interest practised by certain quarters, in the end Umno was dragged into court and declared illegal. Thank God there are many who are sincere about their feelings for the party. Because of them, Umno survives," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the laymen are not totally innocent in this respect, especially when they used their voting power to blackmail the Government to meet their demands.