

Mahathir: Reject deceitful candidates

By WONG CHUN WAI

KUALA LUMPUR: Umno delegates have been told to reject contenders who have resorted to dirty tactics in campaigning for next year's party elections.

Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said it was important for the party to remain united.

He said they should not allow themselves to be split by people with self-interests, adding that they should reject those who were too eager to become party leaders.

"The people who want to see a split Umno comprises those from within and outside the party," he told newsmen after a two-hour closed-door meeting with 1,200 divisional leaders at the Putra World Trade Centre yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether the intense campaigning for the party elections next year would result in a split, similar to that of 1987.

The 1987 elections saw the party divided into a faction led by Dr Mahathir and another led by his challenger, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

Dr Mahathir also said poison pen letters, discrediting certain national leaders, had been circulating around.

"But I don't think Umno members are easily influenced by these letters."

Asked whether these letters were a result of a run-up to the party polls, he replied: "Yes, it appears so."

Dr Mahathir said these letters had urged members to reject certain leaders including himself.

He quipped that these letters criticising him "does not mean that Umno deputy president Abdul Ghafar Baba is responsible for these letters" but they were aimed at running down the Umno leadership as a whole.

The Government would want to act against those responsible but it was not easy to trace them, he said.

On the proposal to set up 12 new divisions, Dr Mahathir hoped that the supreme council need not have to interfere in the elections.

However, if there was a split

following the divisional elections, the supreme council would have to move in

The party would set up these divisions after the Election Commission had determine the location of the 12 new parliamentary constituencies, he added.

On the meeting with the divisional leaders, Dr Mahathir said it was an annual affair, held before the General Assembly started.

He said it was to allow divisional leaders to bring up issues which should be settled

before the General Assembly started.

Among the issues discussed, he said, was the preparation for the imminent Sabah state election.

Some 1,750 delegates are expected to attend the three-day general Assembly next Friday and Umno Sabah would, for the first time, be sending 220 delegates.

Three motions — presidential address, economy and religion — would be tabled for debate during the Assembly. It would be opened by Dr Mahathir.