

Party tradition of succession stays same, says Dr Mahathir

By Syed Nadzri and Jeffrey Ramayah

2 ALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that it was party tradition that the deputy president will be the natural successor as party chief and Prime Minister.

There would be no change in party tradition and his deputy Ghafar Baba would replace him, he said at a Press conference at the end of the Umno General Assembly today.

He was asked whether his statement yesterday that he would not name his successor to prevent a split in the party meant that there was a change in Umno tradition of succession.

"There is no change.

When I spoke of succession to the party leadership, I was referring to the third layer of leadership which involves the vice-presidents.

"Under Umno tradition, the deputy succeeds the president. That's the way it should be."

He said the jockeying now was not for the position of deputy president but for the positions of vice-presidents.

He said he was not for him to state who he wanted as leaders of the party but would leave it to the members to decide.

"Whoever becomes president will choose his deputy."

"When I was appointed Deputy Prime Minister, I was not the most popular candidate but the members accepted the choice of the late Tun Hussein Onn."

Asked what he would ex-

pect of his future successors, he said the person should continue to push towards the target of making Malaysia a fully developed country.

"We should be going in the same direction — towards Vision 2020."

To another question, Dr Mahathir said he would continue to lead the party as long as he was healthy and the party needed his leadership.

"If the party wants me to serve for another term, it is my duty to offer myself for the presidency."

Asked whether he would prevent contests for the top positions in the party, Dr Mahathir said he would not.

"We practise democracy. We cannot stop anyone from contesting. The only thing is it must be done in a

healthy manner."

He said his message to Umno members was to maintain moderation in campaigns for any contest in the party.

He said members should not resort to tactics which are unhealthy such as the use of money to buy support or the use of government machinery for their interests.

Ghafar, who was present at the Press conference, said he did not want to comment on the party succession.

On this year's Umno general assembly, Dr Mahathir said it was well attended not only by the new members from Sabah but also by the observers, adding that this augured well for the party.

"The debates were a fine mixture of quality and light-hearted stuff."