

Accept present **Umno** leadership, urges **Dr M**

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GENTING HIGHLANDS: Umno members should accept the party's present leadership line-up to maintain unity, said its president **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad**.

"I feel that if we unite and accept the present setup (of leaders), this will minimise the chance of a split in the party," the Prime Minister told reporters after opening a seminar on business ethics yesterday.

He added that when Umno was deregistered in 1987, it was due to the race for the presidency post.

"When the race was on, various methods were employed to gain support like 'buying' people."

Dr Mahathir said this in response to an announcement by party vice-president **Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim** on Saturday that he would not challenge incumbent deputy president **Abdul Ghafar Baba** for the post in the party's November elections.

Anwar, whose announcement ended speculations that he would vie for the post, said his decision was in the interest of party unity. However, he declined to say if his decision was final or if he would reject any nomination for the post.

Dr Mahathir added that should **Anwar** receive any nominations for the post,

it was up to him to accept.

"Nominations will be nominations but it will be up to the person nominated to accept it.

"I also received a lot of nominations but the votes that I receive was not that many," he said.

Asked to comment on the offers made by various **Mentris Besar** and **Chief Ministers** for nominations to contest for the three vice-presidency posts, Dr Mahathir said:

"At this point, many will offer themselves (for nominations) but when the time comes, many will

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withdraw when they could not garner enough support as it will be pointless to contest (for the posts) then."

Asked if such competition would be good for the party, he said Umno practised democracy.

"It is their right to contest and their right to evaluate if their decision to contest will result in success or failure."

Dr Mahathir also took **Semangat 46** to task for their inconsistency on the royalty issue.

He said the party, which had sent him a memorandum on the mat-

ter on Monday, while refusing to support the Constitutional amendments to remove the Rulers' immunity, had also stated that it would not condone criminal actions by the Rulers.

"How can we take 'action against criminal acts (by the Rulers) if there is no law on the matter.

"If (Semangat) 46 say that it will not condone such acts but will also not support the law, then it can only mean that they support the criminal acts," he said.

Dr Mahathir added that the Government would

not dispute the legal status of the present Sultan of **Kelantan** if he (the Sultan) had not disputed Parliament's action in passing the bill.

He added that when the bill was tabled in Parliament, the Government had explained to the **ra-kvat** why the Rulers' immunity needed to be removed.

"The people understood this and the majority had supported the amendments but not Semangat 46 because the party has connection with royalty and their leader is from a royal family."