

PM: IT'S NO BIG DEAL

Umno polls 'not crucial' in succession issue, says Dr M

By PAUL GABRIEL

ALOR STAR: The Umno elections in November will not be decisive in determining the likely successors to the national leadership, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

The Prime Minister said the elections would be a normal one and he did not know why it was being tagged as a crucial political contest.

"This year's elections is just like the others. Umno members should not be overly excited (over the outcome) nor should the country be excited," he told newsmen at his Hari Raya Haji open-house at his private residence in Titi Gajah, about 10km from here.

Dr Mahathir, who is the Umno president, was responding to questions on the anticipated hot contest for the three vice-presidents' posts.

Incumbents Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid are expected to be challenged.

Political observers believe that those who clinch the posts will be seen as the likely successors to the national leadership.

Asked whether this year's campaigning was more intense as the general elections were expected next year, Dr Mahathir said the two elections were unconnected.

"Even if we hold the general elections next year, this (party election) would still be an ordinary one," he stressed.

He said there was still plenty of time as the Government had until December 1995 to decide on the general elections.

To a question on whether the Government would complete its full five-year term this time to resolve the political problems in Sabah and Kelantan first, Dr Mahathir said this was possible.

He said if the Sabah and Kelantan gov-

ernments still wished to oppose the Barisan Nasional, it would be their loss.

"We only want to provide them the best administration, but if they reject (us), then they should not blame us for not helping them.

"We always help state governments who are cordial to us. What reason is there for us to help those who oppose us?" he asked.

On the situation in Sabah, Dr Mahathir said the outlook had improved and the people were beginning to accept the Barisan.

He said the Barisan components which had spread to Sabah were getting popular and this was based on the people's response to party events.

"If Sabahans are not incited, I'm confident that they will be more inclined towards the Barisan," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the PBS government in Sabah was conducting unhealthy politics by inciting political leaders with offers of government posts and other luxuries.