

NO FIGHT FOR No 2

By WONG CHUN WAI and ROHA AD A. RAHIM

KUALA LUMPUR: Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim will not challenge incumbent deputy president Abdul Ghafar Baba in the party's November elections, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

The Prime Minister, who is Umno president, said Anwar had already informed the party leadership on his stand.

"Datuk Seri Anwar has said he won't contest. If other people want to contest, that is another matter," he told newsmen after chairing an Umno supreme council meeting.

Dr Mahathir said as far as he knew, the president's post would also not be

Mahathir puts an end to talk on Anwar's candidacy

contested.

However, he said the posts of three vice-presidents and supreme council seats would be contested.

Asked on the party's stand if there were still nominations from divisions to challenge Ghafar, Dr Mahathir replied: "They can nominate but there will be no acceptance. It's a waste of time."

Anwar has twice said he has no intention of challenging Ghafar but it has not stopped speculation that his supporters are making preparations for a contest.

On Tuesday, the Tanjung Umno division chief Zahrain Hashim Zainuddin announced its intention to nominate Anwar for the number two post as the division wanted to make clear Anwar should take over the leadership after Dr Mahathir stepped down.

Dr Mahathir said there might be people who said it was undemocratic not to have a contest but he stressed the party did not need a contest simply to show that the party was democratic.

"At this juncture, in the interest of stability, we feel it will be better if

there is no contest for the posts of president and deputy president," he said.

Dr Mahathir also denied talk at the party grassroots level that he had given his blessings to the campaigning for the post of deputy president.

He said Umno was stable and it was not true that the party had split into two or three factions.

"That is the view of people who are not sympathetic to the party and want to see the party in turmoil," he added.

Reporters, he said, were sometimes happy to see the party in trouble because it would provide them news material.

Approached by reporters later, Anwar said his statements on his stand remained the same and that he had no further comments to make on the matter.