

Party leaders feel it won't be affected by

Umno confident

By Farush Khan and
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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. -- Umno leaders are confident that party unity will not be adversely affected by the November elections, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said this was the feeling expressed by supreme council members at their meeting today. Council members gave their views when they discussed party development at the meeting.

At a Press conference after chairing the 3% hour meeting at the Umno headquarters here, Dr Mahathir, who is also party president, was asked whether the meeting discussed the upcoming general assembly.

He said there were some discussions on the matter.

Everyone gave his/her opinion on the situation in the party, he said, adding that it was not as intense as made out to be.

"They all believe that they can control their feelings and ensure party unity will not be adversely affected just because of the elections."

Asked whether he was still maintaining his stand that the top two posts should not be contested, Dr Mahathir said his advice on the matter should only concern the party's No 2 post.

"I can't advise people not to contest against me. If they want to contest against me, they can (do so)."

However, for the No 2 post, Dr Mahathir felt that it would be better if there was no contest as it would be in line with party tradition. But, he said, the party's constitution allowed it (contest).

Asked whether the statement by Encik Shahidan Kassim, chairman of the Backbenchers' Club (BBC) a week ago endorsing party vice-president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to stand for the deputy presidency against incumbent Abdul Ghafar Baba was discussed at today's meeting, Dr Mahathir said it was.

He said it was discussed "in passing", adding that it

was treated as a normal matter.

Dr Mahathir said outside groups, in an apparent reference to the BBC, should not get involved in party matters.

When asked by a local author whether the meeting discussed "talk" concerning the resignation of Ghafar, Dr Mahathir said: "You want to write a book? You can write what you want." He added that the matter was not discussed.

"He (Ghafar) was here just now but sought permission to leave early as he had some matters to attend to."

Asked about "talk" that a number of Ministers would also resign along with Ghafar, Dr Mahathir said: "Who are they? Please tell. You know more than I do... then why ask me? I should be asking you what's the news?"

Asked to comment on what grassroots members said was an open support by certain Umno leaders for candidates who could be contesting in the party elections, Dr Mahathir said the supreme council did not make any stand on the matter.

"Who made the open support?" he asked.

He said party members were free to do whatever was allowed by the party constitution but it would be advisable that they took party tradition into consideration.

Asked to comment on the aborted motion by DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday, Dr Mahathir said:

"He (Lim) can say what he likes. After saying that, he'll say that there's no democracy in this country...."

Asked whether Umno has selected its candidate for the Batu Talam State by-election in Pahang, he said the party was in the process of picking the right person.

The seat became vacant following the death of Datuk Mazlan Idris last month.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir announced the members of the Umno election committee

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contests for posts
of unity

Dr Mahathir names 10-member party election committee

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responsible for supervising the party polls.

They are Tan Sri Mustafa Jabar, Tan Sri Abdul Samad Idris, Tan Sri Sharif Ahmad,

Tan Sri Azahari Mat Taib, Datuk Hormat Rafaei, Datuk Ahmad Razali Mohamed Ali, Datuk Melan Abdullah, Datuk Siti Rahmah Mohamed Kassim, Datuk Paduka Fatimah Abdul Majid and Tan Sri Khir Johari.

Asked about the recent visits by Palestine Liberation Organisation chairman Yasser Arafat and African National Congress president Nelson Mandela, Dr Mahathir said they had sought Malaysia's support.

They had also briefed him on the actual situation in their respective regions, he added.

Also present at the Press conference were Anwar, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad

Badawi, Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid, secretary-general Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, treasurer Tun Daim Zainuddin, Youth chief Datuk Najib Tun Razak and Information chief Datuk Hussein Ahmad.