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Mahathir-UMNO

I WILL REMAIN NEUTRAL, SAYS MAHATHIR

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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug. 7 (Bernama) -- UMNO president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today party vice-president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was entitled to change his mind about contesting the post of deputy president but he would remain neutral in the interest of party unity.

Dr Mahathir, who is the Prime Minister, said it was only proper that he maintain his neutrality if there was to be a contest.

He added: "I cannot come out in support of any candidate because I must remain neutral.

"If I give my support, it will result in the side that I do not support rejecting my advice."

Mahathir, who is Barisan Nasional chairman, was answering questions from reporters about the party's elections to be held in November, after he opened the MIC's 40th general assembly at the Tenaga Nasional Berhad Multi-purpose hall here. -- more

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Mahathir-UMNO 2 Kuala Lumpur

He said it was his duty to unite UMNO should there be a split among party members if the contest was intense.

"But, my view is that, if there is no contest, it will be better than having a contest because if there is a contest there is bound to be a split, to some extent," he added.

He welcomed Anwar's stand that he would not contest for the party's number two post but would leave it to party members to decide.

Anwar, who is Finance Minister, has said he would not challenge Deputy Prime Minister Chafar Baba for the post.

Dr Mahathir said: "But, if he were to change his mind, that is his matter. I cannot prevent him."

He said what now emerged was a "conflict" between the party constitution and tradition.

Last Thursday, he said any member had the right to contest for the post of deputy president under the party constitution but, traditionally, there was no contest. -- more

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The Prime Minister reiterated his stand that there should not be a contest for the post of party deputy president, now held by Chafar.

Asked whether the UMNO leadership would work out a "compromise" so that there would not be a contest for the post, Dr Mahathir said it did not arise as so far there was no problem.

"Why should there be any compromise when we don't have any problem. I don't see any problem. I don't know why people are excited," he said. --

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