

Dr M: Party must unite after polls

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KUALA LUMPUR: Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad reiterated yesterday he would remain neutral in the race for the deputy president's post.

However, he said it was his duty to unite the party after the elections if the contest between incumbent deputy president Abdul Ghafar Baba and vice-president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim could not be avoided.

"My duty now, if we cannot avoid a contest, is to close the ranks of all the party members after the elections so we can en-

sure that Umno continues to be strong," he added.

The Prime Minister said Anwar, who is Finance Minister, had conveyed to him his intention to contest before making the announcement.

"It is Anwar's own decision," he told reporters after opening Public Bank's Vision Park at Jalan Sultan Sulaiman here.

Asked if he had given the go-ahead for Anwar to contest the post, Dr Mahathir said: "I need not give any blessings because I am neutral."

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Dr Mahathir said he would prefer no challenge for the deputy president's post.

"If there is no contest, it will be easier to unite the party. But if there is a contest, we will have a bit of a problem to re-unite the party.

"That is why I must not take sides," he said.

Dr Mahathir also advised party members who are campaigning in the run-up of the elections to do so in a proper way so that the opposition could not take advantage of the situation.