

Dr M: I hope one of the candidates will withdraw

1511
MST 2.4 AUG 1993

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he hoped that one of the two likely candidates bidding for the post of party deputy president would withdraw from the race.

However, Dr Mahathir said he would remain neutral in the November election.

His immediate duty was to help the supporters of the contestants close ranks to ensure that party unity was maintained.

Speaking to reporters after launching Public Bank's Taman Wawasan here, the Prime Minister said: "There are bound to be problems if there is a contest and we must always ensure that party unity is maintained."

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's announcement today that he was willing to accept nominations to bid for the number two post in Umno.

Asked if Anwar had informed him of the decision, Dr Mahathir said: "Yes, he

informed me."

Asked whether he gave his blessings, Dr Mahathir said: "I didn't give blessings to anyone. I'm neutral. I have a duty, that is, to help supporters of the winner and the loser close ranks.

"I want everyone to unite to strengthen Umno further."

Asked whether he had any advice for both parties on their campaign strategies, Dr Mahathir said they should campaign in a healthy manner, and should not give the Opposition "weapons" to use against the party.

When asked whether his statement that he would remain neutral could be taken to indicate his support for Anwar, Dr Mahathir said anyone could make his or her own interpretation.

When told that a few Mentis Besar had suggested that incumbent deputy president Abdul Ghafar Baba withdraw to prevent a contest, Dr Mahathir said: "That is their view."