

Dr M: It won't be a disgrace if one withdraws from contest

NST 11 SEP 1993

By Rosli Zakaria

KUALA TERENGGANU, Fri. — It will not be a disgrace if a candidate nominated to contest in the Umno elections on Nov 4 were to withdraw because he feels that he cannot win, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Umno president and Prime Minister said it would be better for the contestant to accept reality, but if he insisted on going through the democratic process practised in Umno, then he should accept the outcome of the polls.

He said it would not be wrong not to contest as it

was also not wrong to contest. But the most important thing was to be proper and be guided by a thorough assessment (of one's chances), he said.

"A decision will be made and you will get what you deserve. If a person uses money and we vote him in, this means that we elected a corrupt person.

"Therefore, don't be angry if it ruins the nation. If this happens, then we should carry the burden. You cannot blame anyone else except yourself because you made the decision. Therefore, you deserve it."

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a gathering of Umno

members and community leaders at the Menteri Besar's residence. Apart from Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, others present included Public Enterprises Minister Datuk Dr Yusof Nor and Deputy Primary Industries Minister Tengku Datuk Mahmud Mansor.

Dr Mahathir said it was important for delegates to make a very careful assessment of the candidates they intended to elect because the future of the country would partly depend on their decision.

"I therefore urge the delegates at their divisional meetings to make a careful assessment of their choice

of candidate. The assessment must be based on what we all want, that is, whether the selected person can provide good leadership for the party and country."

He said members should not have the notion that their leaders would stay in their respective positions forever.

"I'm 69 now. I can still stand and talk sense. But I don't know for how long I'll be around or needed. There will be someone who will replace me.

"As an English saying goes, don't overstay your

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welcome. Therefore, I must be clever so as not to overstay my welcome. I pray to God to show me when I should say goodbye."

Later, when asked if any of the present leaders have "overstayed their welcome", Dr Mahathir said: "I was talking about myself. I fear that when the people don't want me, I'll still be sitting here.

"That is why I want to know when I am not wanted. But it is very difficult to know this."

He said there have been accusations that some delegates were bribed and promised certain things.

"If it's true, then it's not good. But if it's not true, we should not make the accusations. I want no bribery or the use of money in the campaigns. The accusations must also stop.

"Accusations will not be good for the party because when the campaign is over, it may be difficult to bring the members together again. Worse still, the accusations may be exploited by the Opposition. When this happens, it will weaken the party."

On whether the nominations of Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from nine divisions yesterday reflected the wishes of party members who wanted change, Dr Mahathir said:

"I don't know whether they want change or not. But it is clear that they chose him. It is their choice. As a democratic party, they can choose anybody."

Advising members and delegates on their campaigns in support of certain candidates, he said: "If the people like a candidate, they will support him. But refrain from giving money or making false promises during the campaigns.

"Also important, don't vent your anger when campaigning."

He appealed to those contesting senior posts at the national or divisional levels to accept the possibility of winning or losing.

"When everything is over, we should close ranks. We should accept the results and congratulate the winner with a promise to cooperate until the next elections."

He said Umno would be weakened should the losers be dissatisfied with the results which they might try to find ways to take their dissatisfaction to court.