

PM: Set up party but observe law

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SUBANG: The Government will approve an application from the people behind the *reformasi* movement to form a political party if they are willing to abide by the law, said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Prime Minister said there would be no problem of approval as long as everything was done properly.

"But if they want to form a party to shoot people, to kill people or to demonstrate every day, we will not approve.

"If they want to have a political party, they can have it," he said.

"No, it's not a threat. These people are cowards. When there are many of them, they are a bit brave, when they are alone, they will be quiet," he told reporters after launching the export of the SME MD3-160 Aerotiga light aircrafts

here yesterday.

In Sabah last week, Dr Mahathir proposed that the people behind the *reformasi* movement form their own political party to contest in elections, and the proposal was accepted by Abdul Malek Hussein who claimed to be a spokesman of the movement.

Malek was detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) recently.

Dr Mahathir said it would be better for the *reformasi* move-

ment to form a party and contest in elections instead of disrupting other people's lives by having street demonstrations.

"It is better than disturbing others who want to do business. Even taxi drivers find it difficult to find business (during demonstrations)," he said.

"During elections, if they want to curse people, go ahead and curse. That's all right. I'm used to being cursed by them anyway. It doesn't make much difference to me," he added.

The Prime Minister admitted that the *reformasi* movement turned political party could erode some of the Barisan Nasional and Umno votes, but said the coalition would not mind losing a bit.

Asked whether Umno members would join the *reformasi* people if they formed a party, Dr Mahathir said some would join because they were not really Umno members.

He said these people who were the ones "just passing

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through" because they thought it would be profitable to join Umno to get contracts.

"Now, the person who gives them contracts is not there anymore. So for them, it is useless to stay with Umno.

"But for most of us, we join Umno because we love the country and we fight for the nation and the religion," he said, adding that others were only interested in filling their own pockets.