

PM: Ceramahs ²⁶ show we are democratic ^{5/11.9.98}

KUALA LUMPUR: The nightly *ceramahs* at Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's house in Bukit Damansara will be allowed to go on because Malaysia is a democratic country.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said if the public speeches and gatherings were stopped, then the media, especially the foreign media, would brand the country as repressive.

"So, we will have to put up with it (the *ceramahs*). It's something that one has to submit to if one believes in democracy," Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, said yesterday.

On claims by Anwar that he had to resort to *ceramahs* because he no longer had access to the mainstream media to tell his side of the story, Dr Mahathir said:

"I don't think so. He has received a lot of publicity, more than I have, and certainly very positive publicity in the international media.

"I never get that. You know, recently they wrote some nasty things about

me which is not fair at all.

"So, I should also be surrounded by my followers because of this attack by the media."

He said even though his former deputy was once close to him, he was taking Anwar's verbal abuses of him now in his stride.

"I have been attacked by deputy prime ministers before. It is a common occurrence and part of the problems that politicians must be prepared to face," Dr Mahathir added.

He also explained that his call during a briefing for Umno leaders on Tuesday, for *sembahyang hajat* (special prayers) to be carried out, were meant for the truth to be known.

"I did not call for these prayers so that I would win or that he would lose or for God to be angry with him.

"I only asked for *sembahyang hajat so* that the truth will eventually be a reality. If I am right, I am right. If he is right, he is right," he added.