

Umno must avoid repeat of 1987¹⁶ experience: PM

By HAMISAH HAMID

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday reminded Umno members that contests for supreme council positions may result in a split within the party which will gradually weaken the party.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said the party's Supreme Council does not restrict contests for the top posts in the May party elections but it wants to prevent the bitter experience of the disension within the party in 1987.

The 1987 elections saw the split in Umno, and the splinter group forming Parti Melayu Semangat 46.

"We have the experience on the tendency for the party to split when there are contests.

"If anybody wins, he would only garner half of the support... meaning Umno's strength will gradually be eroded.

"Those who lose will retreat, disappointed and support other party," he told a news conference at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport upon arrival from a three-week vacation and working trip abroad.

Dr Mahathir questioned the point of having reforms in Umno if the party is getting smaller and smaller after each party election and is no longer effective in the country's politics.

He said the supreme council could not do anything if the reforms of the party mean to destroy Umno so that other splinter parties can be established with their own leaders.

On the possibility of candidates contesting for party posts as a team, he

said the Supreme Council would make a decision after discussing about it.

"I will not give my opinion as it may influence the thinking of others," he said.

Dr Mahathir also noted that there are now many Umno members aspiring to become leaders, give priority to self-interests rather than the party's future.

"These people would feel disappointed when they lose and would work against Umno," he said, adding that this has not only happened

at the divisional level but also at the November general elections where many party members voted for the Opposition.

The Umno president also reminded the party members that it is important for them to go back to the party's founding struggles in representing the Malays and other Bumiputeras.

He said, Umno, after having ruled the country for so long, is capable of developing the country further and accord the ap-

propriate status for the Malays and other Bumiputeras.

He said the Malays are not secured if Umno members gave preference to their selfish aims above the interests of the country and party.

"Our achievements all these while will not only stop where it is now but will be ruined again if we think we're strong enough and can do anything we like now because we're clever and have degrees.

Dr Mahathir also said that an elected leader, even if he is lack of capabilities, can be successful if he secures loyalty from party members.

When asked whether the code of ethics for party elections should be scrapped as the party constitution is available, he said there would be no problems if all members abide by the constitution by accepting victory and defeat in a contest.