

Up to divisions to decide, says Dr M

They can opt for secret ballot or otherwise

By Sarban Singh

SHAH ALAM, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said it was up to Umno divisions whether to conduct secret ballots or not when nominating candidates for party posts or choosing delegates to the party's May general assembly.

However, he said several divisions, including Kubang Pasu (of which he is the head), conducted secret ballots when nominating their candidates for all party posts or electing delegates to the general assembly.

"It depends on the division...whoever wants to nominate through a secret ballot can do so.

"At my division, we just write down on a slip of paper (nominees) and we don't know who gets picked. I don't know about the others (divisions).

The Prime Minister was speaking to reporters after opening Ericsson Mobile Communications Sdn Bhd plant here.

He was commenting on the suggestion by Kelantan Umno chief Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah that Umno divisions should hold secret ballot when nominating their candidates for party posts, including that of president and deputy president.

Tengku Razaleigh had said a ballot would allow members to make their choice without fear, threats or inducement.

At some divisions, the current practice when nominating candidates was done by a show of hands.

Razaleigh had also proposed that delegates from divisions attending the party's general assembly be determined by a secret ballot.

Dr Mahathir, when asked whether there was a need to standardise the procedure for all divisions, said: "I don't know. It is really up to the divisions."

Asked what was his advice to members before the divisional meeting which begins from March 1, Dr Mahathir said their prior-

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ity should be the party.

"We have always emphasised that the party is our priority. The people in the party are not important...they eventually die.

"But we cannot bury the party...the party should live on," he said.

On the mood among grassroots members following the conclusion of most branch meetings, Dr Mahathir said: "I see that Umno members are enthusiastic. They have been adhering to all procedures set by the supreme council and all meetings have gone on smoothly," he said.

On reports that several divisions in Kelantan might nominate Tengku Razaleigh for a top position in the party despite the supreme council's advice that the post of president and deputy president should not be contested, Dr Mahathir said it was "too early to comment".

"Let us wait and see. The divisions have not concluded their meetings yet," he said.