

# No -need to limit president's term: PM

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said it is unnecessary to amend Umno's constitution to limit the term of the president as the party ethics can determine whether an incumbent is to be re-elected or not.

He said, half in jest, that had the constitution limited the tenure of president to just two or three terms, he would not have been able to stay on for 22 years.

Had that been the case, he would not have achieved much, Mahathir said at a press conference at the end of the second day of Umno's 54th general assembly.

Reporters had asked him for his response to suggestions that the president's tenure be limited to either two or three years.

"What about 22 years or something like that?" he retorted. He asked the reporter why he had asked that question.

"Why? You don't like my deputy?"

he said, turning to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who was sitting beside him.

He was also asked to comment on former deputy prime minister Tun Ghafar Baba's suggestion that the post of Umno number two be opened for contest as it was when Mahathir became deputy president.

The Umno president said he was not appointed Umno deputy president by then prime minister Tun Hussein Onn. Tun Hussein only appointed him deputy prime minister.

As the deputy to Tun Hussein, he was unchallenged as the party number two during the party elections.

Asked if his deputy Abdullah had already whispered to him the name of the person he was going to appoint as deputy prime minister when he became prime minister, he said "no".

He said when Abdullah appointed his deputy in October, he would have left the Prime Minister's Office.

"By the way, I never whisper to him, I talk to him side by side."

On a serious note, he said the party is thinking of improving the

code of ethics but that having the code alone is not sufficient if members are unwilling to abide by it.

Yesterday, Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin suggested at the assembly that Umno's code of ethics for party elections should be reviewed to ensure that next year's party elections does not cause a split in the party like the ~~one~~ in 1987.

He said the suggestion was meant to ensure that members maintain discipline during elections as well as harmony and unity which are the strength of Barisan Nasional.

On reducing the Malays' dependence on the New Economic Policy, Mahathir said the government has introduced the merit system in public university intakes and that the people are beginning to accept it.

As for the business community, he said, it will require study.

On Malaysia's Vision 2020, he said things were planned but no one expected the Sept 11, 2001 attack on the US, the SARS outbreak or the currency crisis and "these had upset our plans".