

NEW STRAITS TIMES

DATE: 04/04/2008

# Dr M agrees 'yes-men' existed then

NST-4/4/2008

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed admitted yesterday that there had been "yes-men" during his time as president of Umno.

But he claimed that he had freely allowed dissent.

"When I was president, I gave an opportunity to everyone to speak. When Datuk Musa Hitam (now Tun) resigned, I let everybody speak their minds.

"Eventually, the result was he became deputy president and not deputy prime minister. I did not stop them because this was the decision of the supreme council, not mine," he said.

He told reporters at the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards presentation in Ulu Langat near here that the "yes-men" in his administration were more than matched by the many others who went against him.

Dr Mahathir, whose 22-year leadership of the party and country was marked by increasing authoritarianism after Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Musa's bid to unseat him in 1987, claimed that he may have "suggested" things while in power but never "dictated" them.

He charged that, in contrast, the present supreme council was subservient to party president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"The party has been so controlled that nobody can speak their minds. The only way to send a message to the leadership was to vote for the opposition.

"The reason the Barisan Nasional suffered losses was because the supreme council knew that things were not going well but did not tell Abdullah to change our stand. This is the failure of the supreme council."

Council members have denied that they had been silenced.

Dr Mahathir said, that while he was as party president, if his opponents "really wanted to stand for election, they could".

"Today, if Tengku Razaleigh wanted to stand against Abdullah, he can only get his division to support him. The rest won't propose him because it would be an insult to Pak Lah," he said.

Dr Mahathir was challenged only once, by Tengku Razaleigh, for the Umno presidency. Following the so-called "Team A-Team B" split in 1987, quotas for minimum nominations were imposed to curtail electoral contests.