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# Abolish 30pc party support rule, says Dr M

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad favours reducing the number of nominations required to contest the Umno presidency, a ruling imposed during his leadership of the party to deter challenges for the top post.

The former prime minister and Umno president said it was time to revise the requirement of having at least 30 per cent of party divisions nominate a candidate before he can contest for the presidency.

"I think it should be abolished because it prevents people from freely nominating candidates of their choice," he said after opening the annual general meeting of the Malaysian Islamic Welfare Organisation (Perkim) yesterday.

In an immediate reaction, Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, the international trade and industry minister, said no directive was forthcoming from the supreme council for the quota to be reviewed.

Justifying his call to repeal the provision, Dr Mahathir claimed that during his time as president it was easy to get support from 30 per cent of divisions.

"A challenge is healthy for the party," he said.

Dr Mahathir narrowly defeated Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah by 761 votes to 718 in 1987 under the previous rule which required only two nominations for a contest.

Since the 30 per cent minimum was imposed shortly after, there were no challenges to the incumbent party president until Tengku Razaleigh's abortive attempt against Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in 2004.

Muhyiddin said that as a member of the party's Constitution Committee he had brought before Dr Mahathir a grassroots proposal for lifting the 30 per cent requirement. But he was told by the then president to "leave it as it is".

"This was mainly due to the fact that he was the president and that

the ruling would undermine any challenge to his presidency.

"Contrary to what he (Dr Mahathir) said, it was not easy during his time to get 30 per cent support from divisions as there was psychological fear of the repercussions of going against the prime minister," Muhyiddin said.

Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad, who was sacked from the cabinet following Tengku Razaleigh's 1987 bid, opposed the quota ruling for contenders for seats in the supreme council.

"I have never been for the ruling. But what to do? It was introduced by Dr Mahathir himself.

"When I criticise the decision, everyone says I am critical of Tun. But now it seems he has realised that what he did was not right in the first place.

"I feel that this is a refreshing development where we own up to our past mistakes and suggest that steps be taken to redress them."

On the resignation of three Umno politicians as deputy ministers, Dr Mahathir said it was not right for them to reject the posts just because they were not appointed ministers.

He dismissed the call by DAP chairman Karpal Singh for him to apologise to the sacked judges in the 1998 judicial crisis.

"There is no need for any apology. It (sacking of judges) was done in accordance with the country's laws. Why should there be an apology from me, the government or anyone?" he said.

Dr Mahathir accused Karpal of playing a political game.

"He wants to take action against me because he hates me so much. He was influenced by his hatred towards me."

On the release of the anti-Islam Dutch film *Fitna*, Dr Mahathir said all 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide should unite to boycott Dutch products.