

CRACKS IN UMNO

MUST BE

STAR 30 MEI 1984

REPAIRED FAST

By N.V. RAMAN

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Umno has come through its party elections without any untoward incident but while publicly the party appears to be united, the divisions caused by this year's elections run deep.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has acknowledged that there are cracks in the party and warned that if these are not repaired, there could be serious repercussions for the party.

His plea to party members to put Umno above personalities, to put party interest above self-interest have been well-received at grassroots level but there now appears to be a growing elite of Umno leaders who appear to be ignoring the voice of the grassroots in their quest for power.

Dr Mahathir pointed out that at times, it is not position which some people are after but the perks that go with the position.

Because of the New Economic Policy, the perks can be enormous — those in

powerful positions can only make full use of patronage politics to do well but can also perpetuate power centres.

The apparently increasing readiness to use government machinery for personal political purposes is an indication not only of the stakes involved but the erosion of discipline and the compromising of principles.

In his address to the Umno general assembly last Friday, Dr Mahathir hit out not only at those who practise "money politics" but also those who used government machinery in the campaign for party posts.

And in his winding-up speech on Sunday, he warned of the dangers of extensive politicking for the 1987 party elections; it could lead to people forgetting about the general election, he said.

In the final analysis, he said, what mattered was the power to rule and not party positions — advice which was not only timely but fitting.

For even while Umno delegates inside the assembly

were putting on a show of unity, some leaders and their supporters outside in the foyer were gatheting in separate groups to plan for 1987 (when the next Umno elections will be held).

The talk was not about closing ranks; rather it was to compare notes on friends and foes — proven and potential — at the current assembly and the next one.

Some Umno leaders in fact fear that the intense campaigning that preceded this year's party elections may have given rise to a new breed of Umno leaders.

Said one member, "There is a real possibility that Umno may soon have leaders who will sacrifice long-term national interest for short-term gains at the (triennial) party elections."

"With so many younger people now making their way up, nobody can afford to rest on their laurels. It may soon be a case of anything goes when it comes to party elections."

But another Umno leader looked at this year's results in a more positive light. He pointed out that though all those elected to the Supreme Council were sup-

porters of the Mahathir-Musa leadership, most of those who had been campaigning vigorously against other party leaders in the last 10 years finished party elections — the issue first 10.

Also, the way some of the contestants treated the council (Datuk Khalil Yaqob, Datuk Seri Ramli Ngah Taib and Encik Abdul Karim Sheikh Fadzir) are those who support the leadership but did not go around campaigning against others.

"People who had openly gone around running down others finished much further down than they expected."

"I think Umno has sent a message to its leaders — if you want to campaign or support a particular person, do so by all means but in the process don't try and destroy the credibility of other party leaders," he said.

Even if one accepts this assessment, it may not hold true come 1987 simply because of the changing composition of Umno delegates to the general assembly.

Teachers, who once formed the majority, made up only 27 per cent of this year's 1,280 delegates. Increasingly, the kingmakers

of Umno are the entrepreneurs and though they are not united now, they may well be in the future and able to deliver their votes in blocs.

What is really worrying, however, is the increasing use of patronage to ensure victory in party contests.

Allegations have been made of taxi permits being issued to supporters, of finance company licences being given to particular people, of particular companies being selected for contracts though these companies may not be the most suitable ones for the jobs, of scholarships being given to children of powerful grassroots leaders — and these allegations are backed up by "proof" — the names of those getting these facilities.

Most of these allegations have been dismissed as false and as just part of the slander used in the campaign. But it is a fact that despite the efforts of Dr Mahathir and Datuk Musa Hitam, patronage politics not only continue to prove appears to be taking hold in Umno.

If this system continues to be perpetuated to the Government and the nation.

While some of the pessimistic views expressed by Umno sound unlikely to ever come true, the party in leadership itself has shown that it was worried over the way the campaigns were conducted and has promised a post-mortem.

If need be, Dr Mahathir has said, recommendations would be made to the Supreme Council to amend the party constitution to ensure that such campaigns are checked in future.

While providing rules and regulations may help curb divisive and unhealthy campaigning, the real solution, however, lies in the attitude of Umno members.

If party members are prepared to say no to candidates who are determined to get power at any cost; if they are prepared to uphold the traditions of Umno and if they vote after matured reasoning of the issues involved rather on emotional support for a particular candidate, then Umno will not only continue to prove in the future but will continue to be the backbone of the Government and the nation.