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KUALA LUMPUR, SEPT 29 (BERNAMA) -- UMNO PRESIDENT DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY HE WANTS PARTY MEMBERS TO CLOSE RANKS AND REINFORCE UNITY TO FACE THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION.

HE SAID THE ELECTION, TO BE HELD NEXT YEAR OR THE FOLLOWING YEAR, WOULD BE AN +ACID TEST+, NOT ONLY FOR UMNO BUT FOR THE MALAYS AND ISLAM AS WELL.

THE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION AMONG PARTY MEMBERS SHOULD NOT IN ANY WAY OBSTRUCT EFFORTS TOWARD GREATER SOLIDARITY, HE SAID WHEN ADDRESSING THE UMNO SPECIAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY HERE.

+VALUE THIS UNITY AND EVEN THOUGH THERE MAY BE MISUNDERSTANDING, MONEY POLITICS AND POWER STRUGGLE AMONG US, THESE SHOULD NOT PREVENT US FROM ATTAINING EVEN GREATER COOPERATION,+ HE SAID.

ON THE JUST-CONCLUDED PARTY GENERAL ASSEMBLY, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THE VIEWS PRESENTED BY THE DELEGATES WERE MATURE ALTHOUGH HE FELT THE MEETING WAS NOT AS LIVELY AS THOSE OF PREVIOUS YEARS. -- MORE

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HE SAID HE REGARDED THE DIFFERING VIEWS BETWEEN THE DELEGATES AND THE LEADERS AS +NORMAL,+ AND ADDED THAT THE MEMBERS OF THE SUPREME COUNCIL ACCEPTED ALL THEIR VIEWS IN GOOD FAITH.

JOKINGLY, HE SAID THAT FREQUENTLY THE DELEGATES WHO CRITICISED THE GOVERNMENT AND THE SUPREME COUNCIL THE MOST WERE MORE POPULAR THAN THOSE WHO AGREED WITH WHAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS DOING.

IN A MORE SERIOUS VEIN, HE SAID THAT WHAT WAS IMPORTANT WAS THAT WHATEVER DECISION THAT WAS REACHED, UMNO MEMBERS MUST CLOSE RANKS AND BACK THE MAJORITY TO UPHOLD THE INTEGRITY OF THE PARTY.

+WITH THIS STRENGTH, WE WILL COMMAND THE RESPECT OF THE OTHER RACES, IN THE COUNTRY AS WELL AS ABROAD,+ HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID UMNO HAD PROVEN ITS RESILIENCE BY SURVIVING FOR 39 YEARS, UNLIKE OTHER PARTIES THAT HAD NOT LASTED LONG. -- MORE

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HE URGED THE MEMBERS TO HELP SUSTAIN UMNO'S CONTINUED EXISTENCE AS THIS WAS FOR THE SAKE OF THE MALAYS, THEIR RELIGION AND THE COUNTRY.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR ALSO EXPRESSED HIS APPRECIATION FOR THE MEMBERS' DONATIONS TO THE UMNO COMPLEX FUND, SAYING EVERY CONTRIBUTION MEANT A GREAT DEAL TO THE PARTY.

HE SAID THAT DESPITE THE FACT THAT THERE WERE NOW MANY MALAY MILLIONAIRES, NONE OF THEM HAD HAD THE COURAGE TO PUT UP A STRUCTURE LIKE THE UMNO COMPLEX.

BECAUSE OF THIS THERE WAS A NEED FOR A JOINT EFFORT, HE SAID.

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