

PM urges Umno to close ranks

Need to preserve party and political power

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PENANG, Sun. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight called on Umno members to dedicate themselves to making the party strong and united once again so that it can continue its leading role in deciding the destiny of the nation.

It should dawn on members that it was Umno that had given the Malays dignity and the "right of place" and therefore, it was in the interest of the Malays to preserve the party, he said at a dinner hosted by Penang Umno.

Reason must prevail, for should the strife among members continue it would not be long before political power slipped away from their hands. He warned that once it was lost, it would probably be lost forever as it would be difficult to regain it.

The Umno president said the strife resulting from the April Umno elections had gone on long enough and had incapacitated the party to the extent that it was unable to continue its struggle in the interest and well-being of the Malays and the other communities.

He called on the "two sides" to close ranks so that Umno could be as strong as before when others in the country and outside were awed by it and made it a model to emulate.

"I realise that there are still a few from both sides who are still nursing their anger. Let everyone put aside this anger and reconcile with one another in the interest of unity."

Reconciliation should not be seen as admitting defeat but merely doing what was necessary in the interest of the party.

Among those present at the dinner were Chief Minister Dr

Lim Chong Eu, Perlis Menteri Besar Dr Abdul Hamid Pawanteh, Education Minister Anwar Ibrahim and Umno vice-president Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The Prime Minister said in the interest of party unity the decision of the Umno assembly must not be questioned any more.

Umno must be united and strong. It was for this reason that he was touring the country to explain to Umno members the need for unity.

He said democracy would be a successful system and bring benefit to everyone only if each understood his responsibility under the system.

However, he said, it could also lead to the tyranny of the majority. He agreed that not all majority decisions were good. But in general the majority would try to ensure justice for everyone.

"But the minority should not

try force or influence the majority to accept its decision," he said.

Dr Mahathir said taking up a case against Umno was one such attempt.

By so doing, the minority was trying to prevent or block Umno from functioning. Because of this Umno had been rendered weak and could not function to solve the many problems before it in the interest of the members and the rest of the Malays.

He feared this might establish a precedent and future decisions would be questioned in a similar manner. In the end, Umno would be completely incapacitated.

In his speech, Encik Anwar, who is Penang Umno chief, pledged support for the Prime Minister and his move to unite the party. He also said that Penang Umno would cooperate with the efforts of Dr Lim to bring development to the State.