

A MEETING FOR UNITY

KOTA BARU, Fri. — Umno took another big step towards closing ranks today when Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah came face-to-face for the first time since the bitterly-fought April 24 party elections.

The Prime Minister and Umno president was greeted by the former Trade and Industry Minister when he arrived at the State Umno building to address about 100 Kelantan Umno leaders.

Tengku Razaleigh, who had failed to unseat Dr Mahathir as party president by 43 votes, attended the closed-door meeting in his capacity as Gua Musang division chairman.

The two shook hands and exchanged greetings to loud applause. Both, however, declined to speak to reporters. Dr Mahathir said he would answer all questions at a Press conference tomorrow.

Umno sources said Dr Mahathir had, at the meeting, urged "every party member" to work towards strengthening Umno unity. He, however, did not make any specific reference to Tengku Razaleigh or the latter's position in the party.

The sources said Dr Mahathir touched on the suit filed by 12 Umno members who want the April 24 party elections to be declared null and void.

He said that efforts would be made to settle the matter out of court, they added.

The Prime Minister had arrived this morning for a two-day official visit to the State as part of his nationwide "unity tour."

Among those accompanying him were Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah and Umno secretary-general Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid.

On arrival at the Sultan Ismail Petra Airport, Dr Mahathir told the crowd of 5,000 that although party members might not like "this or that," they should solve their problems through the democratic process and accept the decisions arrived at democratically.

"If we alienate ourselves because we have failed to attain our objectives, then there will not be any victory but disunity. The party becomes weak and power will slip away from our hands," he said.

He added that leaders could be changed and that no one could remain in power forever. "What's more important is Umno and all its members," he stressed.

Dr Mahathir said the question of whether Umno members supported him or not did not arise. "The question is whether you support Umno," he said to loud cheers.

"Unity is the source of our political strength. We will

lose our power if we forget this in pursuit of other interests which won't benefit us.

"It is impossible for all 1.4 million members of Umno to share one opinion. This would be strange indeed. However, we can find matters which we can agree upon and use these as a basis for discussions towards resolving our differences amicably," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan Nasional chairman, refuted claims that the coalition — particularly Umno — was in an "unhealthy situation," divided and that there was a lack of confidence in the present leadership.

He said it was clear that Umno generally still had the solid support of the people. "Only the enemies of Umno are saying otherwise ... that the party is weak and in disarray after the April elections," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that, for instance, the Barisan had contested in the Bukit Tuku by-election and won. "Whatever happens, and though we may have differences, the people generally still support Umno.

"The question is, not who the leaders are. What's important is Umno," he added.

Dr Mahathir said political strength based on harmony had won Malaysia her independence and cited recent examples of certain developing countries which became weak because their peoples were disunited.

The same fate, he warned, could also befall Malaysia if the people forgot the importance of maintaining solidarity.

Later tonight, Tengku Razaleigh attended a dinner hosted by Menteri Besar and State Umno chief Datuk Mohamed Yaacob at the latter's residence in honour of Dr Mahathir.