

Suggestion made by Tunku during talks

# PM: I am willing to see Razaleigh

By Ho Kay Tat

**KUALA LUMPUR, Wed.** — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today reiterated his willingness to meet Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah if such a meeting will help strengthen Malay unity.

The Prime Minister said he has agreed to a suggestion by former Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman that a meeting with Tengku Razaleigh, who is Semangat 46 president, be held.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, was responding to questions by reporters after launching the 40th anniversary celebration of Wanita Umno at the Putra World Trade Centre.

The Prime Minister said the Tunku made the suggestion when they met last Saturday. This is the first time that Dr Mahathir is commenting on the meeting.

"Tunku said I should have a meeting with Tengku Razaleigh and I welcome it," Dr Mahathir said.

He said the outcome of his discussions with the Tunku was that "both sides wanted unity".

Asked how unity could be strengthened, Dr Mahathir said: "One possible way is through discussions and meetings between Tengku Razaleigh and I."

On when he thinks such a meeting will take place, the Prime Minister said: "If there are signs that Tengku Razaleigh wants to see me, I am willing to see him... I have always been willing to see him."

Asked if the Tunku was arranging the meeting, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know whether the Tunku is doing it... I cannot commit the Tunku."

The Prime Minister said his meeting with the Tunku was very cordial and both of them spoke with an open heart.

"We tried to understand better our respective views. To me the meeting was invaluable," he added.

Dr Mahathir has in the past indicated his willingness to meet Tengku Razaleigh. The Prime Minister also offered Tengku Razaleigh a Cabinet position when closing the Umno general assembly last year but this was rejected.

On the presence of the Tunku at the Wanita function today, the Prime Minister said: "This is a good sign from the view of uniting the Umno leadership and the Malays and we welcome it."

Dr Mahathir said he was not aware that several Semangat 46 supreme council leaders were joining Umno as reported in a newspaper.

Earlier in his speech, the Prime Minister said women will continue to be given important roles to play in Umno and the Government based on ability.

He said Umno does not subscribe to the view of certain groups which

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said that Islam forbids women from becoming elected representatives.

A Pas leader recently said that Islam did not permit women to be elected representatives.

Dr Mahathir acknowledged the vital role played by Wanita Umno members in garnering votes for Umno and Barisan Nasional candidates in elections.

However, he advised Wanita members not to think about individual strength but the collective strength of Umno.

The Prime Minister noted that women had made great strides in politics since pre-independence days, though they have not reached the stage like in Pakistan where there is a woman Prime Minister.

"We used to have only one woman Cabinet Minister but now there are two. This was not due to pressure from Wanita Umno but was because they are able," Dr Mahathir said.