

Election test will further divide Malays

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he prefers the problem between Umno and Semangat 46 be resolved through members reuniting under the Umno banner.

He said settling the dispute through a contest in the general election could further divide the Malays and create tension.

The Prime Minister was replying to a question at a Press conference after the close of the three-day Umno general assembly.

He was asked whether he agreed with certain views that the dispute between Umno and Semangat 46 could only be resolved by testing their popularity in the general election.

"Our view is that it is better for there to be unity but if this (settling the dispute through a general election) is what the people want, we cannot stop it as we are a democratic country.

"However, if this is how the problem is to be resolved, there will be disun-

ity and all sorts of slander and accusations will be made (during the election campaign).

"This will not benefit the Malays and the community at large," Dr Mahathir said.

He reminded the people of what happened during the Umno party elections in 1987 when the contest had created tensions and uncertainty in the country.

"However, we cannot do anything if the people want it this way. The people will get the Government they deserve.

"The Government has got no way to stop the people from making their own decision as to the way to resolve the problem. It is entirely up to them," Dr Mahathir said.

To a question whether he has anything to offer Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah when they meet and what he would want in return, he said: "I cannot spell out my terms in the Press as he will then spell out his terms in the Press.

"This may result in us

not meeting at all. I want to listen to what he has to say."

He added that he would arrange the meeting soon.

Dr Mahathir said that he would not meet Tengku Razaleigh alone. "I will have a few other people with me as Tengku Razaleigh is likely to bring a few of his colleagues along."

Asked whether he would agree to revive the old Umno as demanded by Semangat 46, he said: "Everything has to be referred to the general assembly and from the feelings of the delegates, this is the valid Umno.

"It is the continuation of the old Umno which was declared illegal by the court.

"There is a continuation of Umno in spirit, in mind and in its struggle... There has been no break, only a technical requirement that we register again."

Dr Mahathir added that he was confident Umno will be able to increase its present membership of 1.4 million and expected many

former members to return to the fold.

On the general election, he said: "Actually, we have more time before we must hold the general election ... We can wait until October 1991 and not April 1991 as mentioned earlier.

"This is because though we held the last election in April 1986, the first sitting of Parliament was in October 1986. So we now have more time."

However, he said the BN was ready to contest a general election at any time and "not only during good times".

He cited the last general election where the coalition did well though it was held during the recession.

Dr Mahathir added that the Barisan Nasional was unique as the component parties formed the coalition before the elections and not after as in other countries.

On the assembly, he said the delegates had shown a lot of interest in the proceedings and the various issues raised.