

UNITY COMES FIRST, PM TELLS DELEGATES

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad urged delegates to the Umno General Assembly today to give top priority to the party and its struggles when electing the three vice-presidents and supreme council members.

The party president appealed to them "not to be too tied up to a candidate," and to "vote for those with a good record of service."

"More important, all members have to close ranks and fully support the winners after the contest," he said to a loud applause.

"This will ensure that the noble struggles of the party can be continued. The party's struggles are more important than any candidate, individual or leader."



Dr Mahathir, in his two-hour presidential address, spoke on topics ranging from the opposition threat to economic development, and from Islam to the general election.

The underlying theme was Umno and unity, and the part which appeared to have drawn the most interest from the delegates concerned his views on the party elections.

Dr Mahathir said: "The contest should be gentlemanly, and the choice should be based on the performance of a candi-

date as an individual, a party cadre or leader, and if he is in the government, how successfully he has performed his duties in the administration."

Sooner or later, Umno's leadership would be replaced, Dr Mahathir said, adding: "It would be sad indeed if this process of change were to destroy the party."

He said that "various types of diseases" confronted Umno during the elections held every three years.

"Although we were

taught a bitter lesson (in the 1987 party elections), it does not seem to have deterred unhealthy practices," Dr Mahathir said. "We must always remember that elections can split the party if we give priority to the candidate rather than the party."

If winners and losers did not come together after the contest, the party would be weakened and many members would leave, he said.

"What is the use of becoming the leader of the party, complete with

high-sounding titles, if in the end the party loses in the elections and cannot continue its struggles?" he asked.

Dr Mahathir said that character assassinations and other unhealthy campaign tactics would make reconciliation difficult.

"Books containing vile accusations and lies would only result in permanent animosity. Campaigns should be gentlemanly and based on the individual's performance, support for the party and ability" he said.