

PM: Party must still be strong after polls

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By Farush Khan

JOHOR BARU, Mon. — Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said party members should not destroy the party regardless of whether or not the candidates they support win or lose in the Nov 4 elections.

The Prime Minister said that Umno had grown from scratch to become the strongest political party in the country.

Being the pillar of the Barisan Nasional Government, Umno had played a decisive role in the country's development and had earned everyone's respect.

"Therefore, whatever happens, please love Umno. Win or lose, Umno should not be destroyed," the Prime Minister said when addressing Umno members from all Johor divisions after a closed-door meeting with State Umno liaison

committee members at the Menteri Besar's residence.

The Prime Minister said members must protect the party's interests rather than those of individuals because Umno would stay while leaders come and go.

"Since its formation, many of its leaders have come and gone, but the party remains," he said, adding that he realised that he himself would not be at the helm permanently.

However, as a leader his job was to ensure that the party remained strong, he said.

He reiterated his decision to remain neutral in the party elections as he had an important role to play after the elections.

"In any election, there is bound to be anger and tension. If I take sides the party will be ruined," he said.

He cited the split in Umno following the party elections in 1987 and how diffi-

cult it was for the leadership to reunite the members because the loser refused to admit defeat and took the issue to court which later caused Umno to be deregistered.

"That is why I want Umno to remain strong after the elections.

"It will be easier for me to unite the members if I am not seen as taking sides," he said.

To him, winners and losers were both Umno members and he would make efforts to unite them, Dr Mahathir said.

He said that he had heard stories about certain members already expressing their intention to join Semangat 46 after the elections.

"Let me tell you it is not true," he said.

He said it was important that Umno remained strong to ensure strong backing for the Government.