

Close ranks, Dr M urges Umno members

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By KAMARUL YUNUS

WHILE congratulating winners of the Umno Youth and Wanita elections, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad urged all parties to close ranks to maintain party strength.

"Democracy is not about solely supporting the winners of the election. Those defeated in the contest should also give support to the winners.

"Then only is there democracy. It also reflects our understanding of the concept of democracy," he told newsmen after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting in Kuala Lumpur last night.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, was asked whether the slim majority recorded by Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz over incumbent Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman for the post of Wanita chief would create a split in the party.

"I see no problems to that. It is up to the elected leaders to ensure closer ranks among party members. Those who lost should also respect and support the winners," he said.

Rafidah, who obtained 341 votes, won the contest for the Wanita chief post with a majority of 12 votes, against Siti Zaharah's 329 votes.

On whether Siti Zaharah's position as Cabinet minister will be reviewed following her failure to defend the Wanita chief post, Dr Mahathir said there is no relation between the Cabinet post and the party's elections.

Dr Mahathir also welcomed Rafidah and Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, as well as Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein and Datuk Abdul Aziz Sheikh Fadzir as Umno supreme council

members by virtue of their being the chiefs and deputy chiefs of Umno Wanita and Youth respectively.

Dr Mahathir said the Umno supreme council was also satisfied with the preparations for the Umno general assembly which starts today.

Due to time constraints, Dr Mahathir said the supreme council has directed that there be only 12 speakers for the debate on religion and economics,

while delegates from each state will be given the chance to debate on the presidential speech.

The Umno supreme council members will reply on Saturday to the points raised by delegates during the debate.

A total of 1,956 delegates will cast their votes for the party's deputy permanent chairman, three vice-presidents and 25 supreme council members today.