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No objections to contests for top posts

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UMNO president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday they are agreeable to members' call for a contest of the top two posts in the party.

"We feel that if members want a contest, by all means, do," Dr Mahathir said at a press conference at the end of the first day of the Umno General Assembly in Kuala Lumpur.

"But as far as I am concerned, if anybody contests against my deputy, I will support the incumbent," he added.

Anwar, asked if he would support the incumbent of the presidency if he (the president) is challenged, said: "I have made specific mention of that in my speech yesterday (at the opening of the Youth and Wanita assemblies on Thursday)."

Anwar said he had never made any reference to the possibility of challenging the president, blaming it instead on the intrepertation of the media, especially the foreign media, of the speech he made when opening the Johor Umno convention last week.

"What I said in Johor was while we have to recognise the role of the currency traders and the flaws in the international financial system, we will have to make the necessary adjustments ourselves.

"That we have been doing ... what have we done in the last few months, if not make the necessary adjustments in some new programmes or policy changes, including the establishment of the Asset Management Company, corporate governance, effective regulatory framework ... this is on-going."

Dr Mahathir was also asked about Umno Youth chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi's statement on the role played by his son, Umno Youth treasurer Mokhzani Mahathir, acting as a bridge between him and the Youth wing.

"I do not think he (Zahid) meant it that way. He is a Supreme Council member and in the Supreme Council, I am available.

"He (Zahid) does not need to use my son as a bridge. People may see it as another form of nepotism by using my son to influence me."

Asked to elaborate on his statement on anti-leadership activities in his presidential address earlier during the day, Dr Mahathir said it is a universal trend now for economies to be attacked prior to governments being blamed for causing it.

"First, we see an attack on the economy. Then, there is an attack on the Government where the Government is blamed for the economic problems.

"There is a pattern. We are seeing this happen worldwide. By so doing (blaming the Government), the attention is diverted away from the attackers of the economies."

Dr Mahathir said he will address Umno Youth's call for an introduction of anti-trust legislation at the end of the assembly while Anwar will reply on the call for Pengurusan Danaharta Nasional to help out the small- and medium-sized industries.

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