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Avoid repeat of 1987 incident

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PENANG, Mon. - Umno cannot afford a repeat of the 1987 split when the party was weakened due to disunity, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim cautioned party members today.

He stressed that a no-contest stand for the party's top two posts during the coming Umno general assembly would strengthen the party.

"Remember the repercussions (to Umno) of Kelantan and Terengganu and the inroads made (by the Opposition) in Kedah, Pahang and Perak (in reference to the just-concluded general election).

"We cannot afford another 1987 incident until and unless we strengthen the party," he told reporters after opening the International Group of Experts on Corruption Workshop at the Northam Suites Hotel.

In April 1987, Umno held its most fractious party election. Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and then deputy president (then Encik) Ghafar Baba were challenged by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and (then Datuk) Musa Hitam.

After Tengku Razaleigh lost the election, his disgruntled supporters filed a lawsuit at the High Court in 1988, claiming improprieties in the Umno branch elections preceding the national party election.

In a landmark judgment, judge Datuk Harun Hashim declared Umno illegal. Tengku Razaleigh later formed the now defunct Parti Melayu Semangat 46.

Rais, who is MP for Jelebu and Umno Jelebu division adviser, has announced plans to run for one of the three vice-president posts in the May 11 party election.

Conceding that although it would be "nice to rush into the fray", Rais however cautioned of repercussions if a fight for the top two posts occurred.

"It would go against Umno's ideals of strengthening the Government and protecting the rights of Malays," he said.

When asked to comment on the issue of running mates, Rais said while he was not in favour of the issue, it was not wrong.

The move, he added, should not "close doors" for potential leaders with calibre.

"Those wanting to contribute to the party and who are able to do so should not be side-lined in this process," he said. "Traits such as competency, honesty and qualifications should be found in aspiring candidates."

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