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Khalil-Veep

CONTEST FOR VEEP POSTS WILL BE A NORMAL AFFAIR, SAYS KHALIL

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 5 (Bernama) -- The keen tussle expected for the three vice-president's posts at the Umno General Assembly in May will be a normal affair as party members were familiar with the aspirants.

Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said contestants for the posts have been in the party for some time and this would ease the tense situation.

"Most of the heat will be taken out with no contest for the president and deputy president's posts," he said when asked if the contest for the vice-presidency would have serious consequences on the party.

Incumbent Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak had declared that he would defend the post while Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim and Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim have expressed interest to vie for the posts.

The Umno supreme council in its meeting on Monday decided that there be no contest for the top two posts in the party.

It also proposed that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad be renominated for the presidency and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi be nominated for the deputy presidency.

Khalil said he was confident there would be no other nominations for the president and deputy president's posts as all the 165 divisions were expected to toe the line as a sign of solidarity and unity in Umno.

"Intense contest will split the party. Now, there is a consensus at the top and it should be passed down to the grassroots level," he said.

The decision had received encouraging response from party leaders and members, said Khalil, who is Information Minister.

Asked if action would be taken if there were other nominations for the top two posts, Khalil said the party would response to it when the time comes.

Khalil said it was crucial to avoid any signs of split especially with the current view that the support for Umno was waning.

"There's an immediate need to show the party is intact," he said.

Khalil said he believed members would abide by the supreme council's stand as there were ample time to explain to them the rationale for the decision.

Branches had been given six weeks from Jan 16 to hold their annual general meetings while divisions one month beginning March.

He said the post-mortem on the Nov 29 general election was equally important although the attention now seemed to be more on the party election.

"Grassroots leaders should study the trend of voting in their areas, the party's strength, whether young people are joining us and if the wind of change is temporary," he said.

Khalil said division heads have been instructed to attend as many branch meetings as possible to explain the supreme council's advice as well as gather feedback on the party's performance in the general election.

Asked if there were plans to forbid candidates vying for party posts from opening or attending divisional meetings apart from their own division, he said, there was no such ruling at the moment.

"We'll see the intensity of the contests first. The Management and Disciplinary Committee will monitor the branch meetings before making any

decision," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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