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Hard to justify proposal for election hopefuls to vacate government posts

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LET us hope that Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah was not driven by spite when he suggested that contestants in the Umno elections take leave from their government posts.

One is indeed hard-pressed to try to justify the proposal.

Margaret Thatcher, John Major, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Tan Sri Musa Hitam, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Tengku Razaleigh did not vacate their posts when they contested in party elections.

US Vice-President Al Gore is busy campaigning to become the Democrats presidential candidate. By the look of it, Gore will be campaigning throughout the year if he clinches the nomination.

Other leading contenders Senator Bill Bradley (Democrats), Governor George W. Bush and Senator John McCain (Republicans) have likewise not vacated their posts.

This, in the eyes of Tengku Razaleigh is tantamount to a conflict of interest.

The Tengku Razaleigh of the past was more accommodative.

He may well remember contesting the vacant post of Umno deputy president in 1981 when he was Finance Minister.

Three years later, he challenged Musa when he was Finance Minister.

In 1987, he did not vacate his post as Trade and Industry Minister when he challenged Dr Mahathir for the number one post in Umno.

Tengku Razaleigh then left Umno to form Parti Melayu Semangat 46. He has not been in the Cabinet since.

He now expects everyone, including the Umno loyalists, to join him outside the Cabinet.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi retained the post of vice-president in the 1990 Umno elections as an MP who did not prod the rest to "level" the playing field.