

'Najib's call conforms to tradition'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. Datuk Seri Najib Razak's support for Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to succeed the Prime Minister is regarded by Umno leaders as one which conforms to party tradition.

They also said party members should disregard attempts by the Opposition, particularly Pas, to discredit Abdullah.

Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib today said Umno's tradition that the No 2 take over the top post was the reason why the party had remained stable each time there was a transition of power.

He believed vice-president Najib, like other Umno leaders, wanted members to uphold this tradition.

"The transition has always been smooth in the past from the times of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra to now. It is, thus, natural that Abdullah, being the Umno deputy president, becomes Pas' target in its attempt to disunite Umno. Umno members should not fall into this trap," he said.

The on-line opinion poll was conducted by Pas official organ *Harakah*.

Muhammad said: "The poll is to pit Umno leaders against each other. Pas will be very happy because the attention on its internal problems and other conflicting issues it faces with other Opposition parties will be shifted to Umno," he added.

Najib was reported to have made the call yesterday in response to the *Harakah* poll.

He was also quoted as saying the question of who should become the next Prime Minister did not arise as all quarters understood that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had given the assurance that Abdullah would be replacing him.

The results of *Harakah's* first poll, asking respondents whom they trust to replace Dr Mahathir as Prime Minister, showed Najib topping the list followed by Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Abdullah, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, and Muhammad.

Latest results on *Harakah's* second poll also ranked Abdullah third with 443 votes while Najib had obtained 2,638 votes from the 4,378 respondents.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said a systematic transition of power would maintain Umno's stability and ensure the party continued to be relevant in fighting for the welfare and the rights of the Malays.

He claimed Pas was trying to discredit Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, to take revenge on the Government's decision to ban *ceramah*.

"They also shared the confidence that Abdullah would succeed Dr Mahathir and started to attack his leadership," he added.

He said the credibility of the results was doubtful and he believed Umno Youth members and Malaysians knew it was only a political gimmick.

Pas, he said, had attacked Dr Mahathir and now it was using the same tactic against Abdullah.

Wanita Umno secretary Datuk Faridah Abu Hassan said Abdullah was a capable leader and there was no question in Umno about the deputy president taking over the post of Prime Minister when it is vacated by the party president.

Harakah editor Zulkifli Sulong said the poll was initiated without any bad intention.

He said the second poll, which was started last week, was conducted because many people had questioned the results of the first poll which ends tomorrow, but it could be extended because it was popular.