

never had the top vice-president chosen to be the deputy.

“When Razak took over from Tunku, he chose (Tun) Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman who was then the third vice-president in terms of ranking. When Dr Ismail passed away, Razak chose Hussein, who was also the third vice-president.

“Hussein, too, did the same thing when he chose Dr Mahathir as his deputy. Dr Mahathir was also then the third-ranking vice-president.”

In fact, even Dr Mahathir overlooked Najib, who was the top vice-president when he picked Abdullah as his deputy in 1999.

Abdullah then, was the number two vice-president.

Party history reveals that the choice of deputy always creates much discomfort among members.

It is a well-known fact that Hussein, after assuming the Umno presidency and Prime Ministership in 1976, was planning to make supreme council member Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie his deputy.

The rest of the party leadership opposed his plans, urging him to choose his deputy from among the vice-presidents — (Tun) Ghafar Baba, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Dr Mahathir, in the order of seniority.

When he chose Dr Mahathir, Ghafar, who had been top vice-president then for two terms, was said to have felt slighted (*merajuk*). He withdrew from active participation in both Government and party.

Interestingly, there appears to be greater sensitivity over the choice of deputies compared to that of presidents and Prime Ministers.

Thus far, Umno has shown a good track record in terms of filling the number two post even though the problem of doing so has always been obvious: there are three vice-presidents and only one deputy's post.

But this has never resulted in a split in the party.

Such a situation would only arise if there is an ambitious number two who cannot wait to be number one.

The bottomline is that Umno members have options — to pick up Dr Mahathir's hint or accept whoever Abdullah later chooses as his deputy.

If they still do not have faith in the wisdom of their elders, then there is the RAHMAN theory which they can pursue.

But should they rely on a theory of coincidence?