

16 JUN 2003

Najib-Deputy

NAJIB WILL NOT QUESTION ABDULLAH'S CHOICE OF DEPUTY

KUALA LUMPUR, June 16 (Bernama) -- Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today that he will not question the wisdom of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in choosing the deputy prime minister when it is time for him to make the appointment.

He said no one could question Abdullah's choice of deputy prime minister as that would be his prerogative when he becomes the prime minister.

"Given his (Abdullah's) vast experience, surely he would make a decision based on the interests of the country, Umno and the people's struggle as a whole," he said.

"It would be odd for us to dispute or question the incoming Prime Minister's choice of deputy prime minister," he told a news conference on the motions to be tabled at the Umno General Assembly, which begins tomorrow.

Najib, an Umno vice-president, said this when asked to comment on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's concern about the possible jostling for the Umno deputy president's post when he retires in October.

Dr Mahathir, in an interview with *Mingguan Malaysia* yesterday, said he was worried that any jostling for the post of deputy president in the party election next year could cause an upheaval.

In their reactions, the other two vice-presidents, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Tan Sri Muhammad Muhd Taib, were reported to have said that they would also abide by Abdullah's decision.

Najib, when asked if Dr Mahathir's statement could be taken to mean that the post would not be contested next year, said: "Let's not make assumptions because the important thing is the preparation for the general election.

"I have confidence in the wisdom of the leaders and delegates (on this matter). We need to ensure that our strength is not eroded. The other leaders and I will work hard to ensure that Dr Mahathir's suggestion can be defended to remove his worry about the scramble for party posts," he said.

Najib, who is Motions Committee chairman, said Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein would table the motion on the presidential address, which will be seconded by Puteri Umno chief Azalina Othman Said.

"Our rationale in picking these two leaders is to show the process of continuity and the support of the younger generation for the Umno struggle," he said.

The motion on education and religion will be tabled by Kluang Umno division head Senator Datuk Gapar Gurrohu and seconded by Datuk Zainal Abidin Sakom of the Hulu Selangor division.

The motion on economy will be tabled by Wanita Umno delegate Raja Ropiah Raja Abdullah and seconded by Bachok division deputy chief Datuk Dr Awang Adek Hussin.

Najib said the motion on the presidential address would touch on international issues, the world order, the role of Islamic countries like Malaysia and certain internal matters, including the party president's remarks.

"I hope his (Dr Mahathir's) suggestions would be used as a guide by Umno members," he said.

-- BERNAMA

ERE AHH MAI YBY

