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TOP UMNO LEADERS WANT PAK LAH TO PICK HIS DEPUTY

SERDANG, June 15 (Bernama) -- Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today that he has received assurances from top party leaders that he should choose his deputy in the party when the time comes.

Abdullah said these leaders had also stated that they would support whoever was chosen by him as the Umno deputy president.

"At the moment I have been informed (of this) and have received assurances from the vice-presidents, leaders of the Umno Youth, Wanita and Puteri movements, information chief and secretary-general as well as the heads of the respective State Umno Liaison Bodies throughout the country.

"They have told me that the selection of the deputy is left to Pak Lah. Pak Lah should not announce it yet, only announce it after Pak Lah has taken over. And whoever Pak Lah chooses, we will support," he said after launching the Mega Solidarity 2003 celebration at Bukit Ekspo Universiti Putra Malaysia, here.

Abdullah said this when asked about the views of the Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in a special interview in the "Mingguan Malaysia" today which among other things expressed his fear about the possibility of a contest for the post of party deputy president after he stepped down in October.

According to Dr Mahathir, he feared that the tussle for senior posts in the party particular for the number two post at the Umno election next year could cause friction.

"I too feel the same. But we have to strive to avoid (the tussle for the post). Efforts have been made to get assurances from the vice-presidents, heads of Umno Youth, Wanita and Puteri Umno, the information chief, secretary-general as well as the heads of State Umno Liaison Bodies throughout the country.

"They have all told me that Pak Lah should choose his deputy when the time comes and we will support. It means there won't be any tussle.

"As it has been agreed that I should choose, then what's the use of campaigning. Just wait. The campaigning is futile," said Abdullah.

He said what was important was to strengthen party solidarity because the competition was not within the party but would come from outside, that is, the opposition parties in the next general election.

"That's the real battle...that's where the real fight is. Not within the party. So, preparation must be made (to face the opposition and the general election). This is more important than fighting for posts among ourselves," he added.

-- BERNAMA

RV MFJ AO