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Abdullah, Najib get the nod (HL)

By Zubaidah Abu Bakar; Tony Emmanuel

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The country's top two leaders are a cusp away from being elected Umno president and deputy president respectively.

Umno's highest decision-making body last night decided unanimously that it wants Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his deputy Datuk Seri Najib Razak to be unopposed at the Sept 23 party elections.

The supreme council felt this would be consistent with the wishes of Malaysians, who had returned Barisan Nasional to power with a resounding victory in the general election.

By convention, Umno rank-and-file fall into line after a decision has been reached by the council.

"All those who attended the meeting had entrusted me to issue a statement on the stand we had taken," said party secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob today.

Khalil said that he did not announce the decision yesterday to avoid creating the perception that Abdullah had had a hand in it.

"Neither Abdullah nor Najib was involved at all in the discussion, although they were present," he added.

Abdullah became Prime Minister and acting Umno president on Oct 31 when Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad retired.

Najib was subsequently appointed Deputy Prime Minister and entrusted with the duties of deputy president.

Khalil said the supreme council felt it was necessary to make its stand known on the top two positions, as the divisional elections were imminent.

Umno divisions will hold their meetings in July, where they will nominate candidates for top party posts.

"We want to tell the divisions that none of us holding senior posts in the party is interested in going for the number one and number two posts.

"I have also been in contact with the divisions, and none of them has indicated that they want to nominate anyone other than Abdullah and Najib for the two posts," he added.

Vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib and information chief Tan Sri Megat Junid Megat Ayub said Abdullah and Najib were most suited for the posts, as they were accepted by Malaysians as leaders.

This was evident in the BN's victory in the March general election.

"The people recognised their leadership, and there is no reason for Umno members not to endorse this," said Megat Junid.

Malacca Chief Minister and supreme council member Datuk Mohd Ali Mohd Rustam believed it was the wish of all Umno divisions to see the top two positions go to Abdullah and Najib. "The supreme council was doing what it should do, that is, to state its stand on the matter."

Najib said the council's decision was not aimed at curbing the democratic process.

"It is important that we respect the decision made by the people," he said, after witnessing the co-operation collaboration agreement between Eurocopter Malaysia and Composite Technology Research Malaysia in Subang.

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