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Abdullah: Don't speculate on contests for posts

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has advised Umno members to stop speculating on the possibility of contests for top Umno posts at the next party elections.

The deputy Umno president said such speculation should not arise as all the party leaders had acknowledged that contests for the posts could cause disunity.

He was commenting on the fear expressed by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that contests for the posts would be detrimental to Umno.

Abdullah said if there were contests, there would be bad-mouthing, accusations and counter accusations that could cause a rift among the party leaders.

At a Press conference after launching a patriotic essay competition organised by the Overseas Umno Club Alumni, Abdullah said avoiding contests for the top posts did not mean disregarding democracy.

The competition, offering total prize money of RM50,000, is divided into the Bahasa Malaysia, English and Arabic categories, and is open to students of local and overseas institutions of higher learning.

"We must consider whether the democracy we practise is good or bad to us," he said, adding that excessive unhealthy campaigning would result in a leader being seen or perceived as unclean and could tarnish the image of the party.

He also said in the event that there were contests for the top posts, the party might have to impose the code of ethics that it had drawn up to check unhealthy campaigning.

Asked if it was possible to appoint a deputy prime minister who is not the Umno deputy president, Abdullah said such a move could cause infighting in the party.

He said going by the party tradition and also by convention, the Umno deputy president would be deputy prime minister.

"If this practice and tradition has served the party well, why should we deviate from it because whoever is elected Umno deputy president would certainly want to become deputy prime minister."

Abdullah said there was no need to continue talking about the party election and that all focus should be on shaping the future of the party and Malaysia.

"We should be talking about how we can improve ourselves and be competitive in the global arena," he said, adding that weathering the challenges ahead would not be a problem if dealt with collectively.

In his speech, Abdullah said a sense of patriotism must be instilled among the younger generation to prevent them from compromising the interests of the nation.

He commended the Overseas Umno Club Alumni for organising the essay competition as it would help instil patriotism among students.

"If we are patriotic we will love our country and religion and will not compromise the interest of the nation."

Patriotism would go a long way towards propelling Malaysia to greater heights in the political and economic fields.

He said patriotism also meant mastering knowledge, such as improving communication skills in foreign languages, in order to be competitive globally.