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`Members have option involving party posts'

UMNO vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Razak, while agreeing that the Umno constitution allows contests in the party, said members had the option of following the convention when deciding who should fill the party's top posts.

"Constitutionally, it (contest) is allowed, but we are talking about going by tradition and convention," he said in response to a suggestion by former deputy president Tun Ghafar Baba that contest for party deputy president should be allowed.

Najib said party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had given advice about the need to respect and adhere to the party's tradition and convention.

He also said that due consideration would be given to suggestions to strengthen the party's code of ethics to deal with members who did not adhere to party discipline, in the event that there were contests for the top posts.

"There are various things that are not allowed under the code of ethics, but the question is how they can be strictly enforced," he said, adding that a member could be sacked if he went against the code of ethics.

Another vice-president, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, said it was important for Umno leaders and members to give a 100 per cent endorsement to the choice of candidate for the party's number two post.

"It is true that in terms of procedure, the post can be contested.

However, Dr Mahathir has grounds to say that the post be left unchallenged.

"Can we, for once, abide by our beloved president's advice? No contest does not mean that we do not respect members' wish or that we are sidelining democracy. This is, after all, for unity and strength of the party."

It would help avoid a split in Umno, Muhyiddin added.

"Our president wants to avoid political conflicts which can endanger the party as past experience had shown how these had badly affected the party.

"Although the party will recover (after the conflict), it will take a long time for the wound to heal. This, indirectly, will affect the party and unity in Umno," Muhyiddin said.

"If we call ourselves loyal Umno members, we should leave the post unchallenged to prevent a split and jostling for posts."

Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said members should bear in mind that a smooth transition in the party leadership was necessary to ensure that the party remained strong and united.

He added that party leaders had repeatedly reminded members about the negative implications if there were contests for the top posts.

Concurring with Hishammuddin, Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said the overall mood among the delegates was that a contest for the top posts should be avoided.