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Heed Dr M's advice, Umno leaders urged

Sajahan Waheed; Ahmad Fairuz Othman

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Umno leaders must listen to the party president's reminder to avoid contest for the deputy presidency as it might lead to disunity and weaken the party.

Party vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib said he was strongly against a contest for the post as records have shown that Umno was weakened every time a top post was contested.

He said when Umno became weak, the opposition parties would stand to gain and this was something the party leaders and members must avoid.

"Our party president has reminded us again and again and we ought to listen to him. There is no point fighting for the post when the party will suffer in the end.

"In previous general elections, we lost some seats due to disunity in the party and because Umno was weak. Let us learn from the past and don't repeat the mistake," Muhammad said.

To a question that a contest for the deputy president's post was something normal in the party's history, Muhammad said: "I believe the party can do without a contest.

"When there is a contest, it not only involves one or two individuals but also their supporters and eventually it will lead to a split in the party."

Muhammad was commenting on Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement on Sunday that party leaders must maintain the noble values and avoid fighting for power after he steps down on Oct 31.

There has been speculation of a possible tussle for the deputy presidency after Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi moves up to lead the party.

Umno information head Tan Sri Megat Junid Megat Ayob said Umno leaders should avoid a contest for the number two post if they were sincere in maintaining party unity.

"Fighting for posts is something natural in any political party, but it is an unhealthy practice as it might lead to disunity among the members."

Penang Wanita Umno chief Datuk Saripah Aminah Syed Mohamad said the unity of the Malays would be at stake if there was a tussle for the deputy president's post.

She said during the 1999 general election, Umno lost the majority of votes in several constituencies as a result of disunity among party members.

"We must follow the advice of Dr Mahathir because there has been too much disunity among the Malays."