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Maintain no-contest mood, veeps urged

Hamidah Atan; Ridzwan Abdullah, Carol Murugiah; Ahmad Fairuz Othman
KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The three Umno vice-presidents must not change their minds about challenging Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's choice of successor when he becomes Prime Minister if they want to sustain the no-contest mood in the party, a Johor divisional leader said today.

Senai Umno division chief Adam Abdul Hamid said the Umno grass-roots would be taking the cue from the vice-presidents - Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib - who have made an "extraordinary pact" not to challenge Abdullah's choice, thus preventing any contest for the party deputy presidency.

"People may instigate, but it is up to them to decide if they want to contest," said Adam, who is also a Johor executive councillor.

He said they must not, therefore, change their minds about challenging Abdullah's choice because if they did after having reiterated their stand, they would lose the grassroots' respect.

"It is a matter of principle."

Adam said Umno members would generally obey the appeals of the three vice-presidents to refrain from instigating them to contest the Number Two post.

"There are two scenarios when it comes to competition. The first being the contenders themselves getting their supporters to lobby on their behalf.

"The second is grassroots leaders wanting their preferred candidate to contest for the post. This kind of competition is healthier.

"But ultimately, it boils down to the vice-presidents themselves, whether or not they want to contest."

Umno concluded its 54th general assembly on Saturday during which the three vice-presidents pledged not to challenge Abdullah's successor. The Deputy Prime Minister, by convention, is the party's deputy president.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad steps down as Prime Minister and Umno president in October. After his shocking announcement to retire at last year's party assembly, he named Abdullah as his successor.

Dr Mahathir made it clear that he was leaving it to Abdullah to name his successor.

Abdullah said last week that he would name his choice when he took over the premiership.

Najib, Muhyiddin and Muhammad, as party vice-presidents, qualify for the post. However, Najib and Muhyiddin, by virtue of their seniority, popular votes and being ministers, are in the running to succeed Abdullah.

The three vice-presidents, in an interview on ntv7 last night, reiterated their no-contest pledge but also urged party members not to instigate them to challenge Abdullah's choice.

Mersing Umno division chief and Deputy Human Resources Minister Dr Abdul Latiff Ahmad said it was obvious that if there were any grassroots supporters instigating the Umno vice-presidents to challenge for the deputy's post, then both sides were involved.

"Having said that, it is still up to the vice-presidents to decide if they want to contest no matter how much the people instigate them.

"As far as my division is concerned, we should just let Pak Lah decide whom he wants as his Number Two. This is the best present for outgoing president Dr Mahathir.

"Contesting the Number Two spot would only make Umno lose face with the

Malays outside the party."

Raub division chief Datuk Shahiruddin Ab Moin said even if there remained self-centred ambitions among certain groups of supporters, their ideas would likely end up without the necessary support.

"There is no longer any room to carry them out ... the party is now united and focused," Shahiruddin, who is also a State executive councillor and State assemblyman for Dong, said today.

He said the recently concluded Umno general assembly had brought about much self-realisation among party members that a smooth transition of power was crucial for Umno to be strengthened further.

"This realisation, I strongly believe, is being felt at every level ... from the ordinary party member to all the leaders."

Lipis division head Datuk Omar Othman said party leaders and members were confident the three vice-presidents were sincere when making their open declaration to keep the deputy president's post contest-free.

"I believe they will make good what they have openly said ... not just for now, but also at the time when it really matters."

He said members were now ready to accept any leader for the post of deputy president once Abdullah took over as Prime Minister and party president.

Omar, who is Jelai State assemblyman, said members had seen for themselves before how factions could disunite and weaken the party structure.

Tampin division chief Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor said the vice-presidents, in making their pledges, were selfless, sincere and honest in ensuring that the party remained strong and united.

"They are prepared to sacrifice for the party. This will lead to a stronger and more dynamic Umno," he said.

Shaziman said leaders must always be able to make a good decision for the party so that even if they were provoked by members, they must be able to decide, once and for all, what was good for the party and the nation.

Johor Baru Umno Youth chief Abu Talib Alias said supporters of the three vice-presidents should abide by their wish but added it would be natural for dissatisfaction among supporters of the leaders who were not chosen.

He said this did not mean the dissatisfied supporters should do as they please but should instead maintain unity.

Umno Youth exco member Ismail Sabri Yaakob said the leaders must be responsible for their actions and not be influenced by their supporters if their demands were detrimental to the stability of the party.

"As a leader, we must make our followers respect and follow us and not have them control our decision."