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Umno leaders: Focus on general election

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Umno leaders agree that the next general election should be their focus and not speculation about their positions.

They also agree that the decision on who will be retained or dropped as candidates should be left to the wisdom of party deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who will take over as Prime Minister and Umno president when Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir steps down in October.

Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Taib said today all quarters should work together towards strengthening Umno and countering attacks by the Opposition.

"That ought to be our direction now. There is no need to raise issues on who will be retained or dropped now."

Muhammad said this when asked to comment on Abdullah's reminder yesterday that party members at all levels must not speculate on the leadership succession in October and their positions after that.

Abdullah said such speculation could create unnecessary problems for the party and havoc at the division or branch levels.

He was responding to Perlis Umno chief Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim's claim of receiving threats that his position as the Menteri Besar would be threatened once Abdullah takes over as the Prime Minister from Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in October.

Puteri Umno head Azalina Othman Said said there was no point in making any speculation as it might create disunity in the party and give rise to factions which was not a good development.

"All our priority now should be focused towards gearing up for the next general election. That is most important as there is no point in holding a position if Barisan Nasional does not do well in the general election."

Negri Sembilan Umno head Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad said Umno members should place their trust in the party leadership and let the existing system run its course.

Mohd Isa, who is also Menteri Besar, said members should not waste time speculating on positions in the party or candidates for the next general election.

Selangor Umno chief Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo said this was not the time to make such speculations and members should instead concentrate on ensuring a big victory for the BN in the next general election.

"Umno must remain united at this crucial time of leadership change and such speculation will not bring any benefit to the party. It will only result in negative impacts."

Umno Youth executive council member Mohd Norza Zakaria said that internal bickering or speculation among Umno leaders would only benefit the Opposition who would harp on it as they are running out of issues.

"Why do we have to create situations which expose our weaknesses?"