

Delegates steered clear of Tun issue

DATUK Seri Najib Tun Razak made it a point to drop by at each of the three Umno wings as they began their assemblies yesterday.

The three wings are the deputy president's "portfolio" each time the party convenes for their annual gathering and he caused a stir, particularly at the Wanita Umno wing, when he walked in looking relaxed in a dark suit.

Many of the senior ladies have a sort of crush on the tall and fair-skinned Najib - and his *bibir merah* or pink lips.

His wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor also spent the morning at the Wanita assembly and the couple sat side-by-side listening to the debate.

Some of the delegates joked that the deputy president's presence was to remind Umno's "wings beneath the wind" of the dos and don'ts for the gathering.

There has been no shortage of instructions from the party leadership for those attending Umno's 57th gathering.

There is no gag order on issues of debate but they have been told there are to be no personal attacks and not to hurt the feelings of component Barisan Nasional partners.

There is also no expressed order on the

"Tun issue".

But from the tone of the deputy president's speech when opening the assemblies of the three wings, it was clear that the party did not want to see the dispute between the former and present presidents overshadow other issues.

Najib, whose speech at the joint opening of the three wings, underscored "complete loyalty to our leaders," had talked about the "great apprehension when the leaders we cherish begin to squabble." But he paid a tribute as well as saying that today's generation acknowledges and appreciates every idea and policy that had transformed the socio-political landscape.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein Onn did the same, pledging full loyalty to the president and expressing gratitude to Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's contributions.

His approach met with approval from

Youth delegates for they broke into loud applause at the mention of Dr Mahathir's name.

Several speakers in the Youth assembly also made references to Dr Mahathir but did not dwell on the dispute.

In fact, it is possible that delegates were more interested in watching the body language between rivals Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir and deputy head Khairy Jamaluddin who were seated on the stage with the rest of the Youth exco.

Delegates at the Wanita and Puteri wings appeared to side-step the "Tun issue" although the Wanita chief made what many saw as a veiled attack on the former Premier.

She chastised those who were trying to topple the leadership and smear the party's and government's reputation, and caused all sorts of problems.

She slammed individuals who insisted that only their views were right as going against the grain of democracy.

Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz's feelings about Dr Mahathir are well known.

There is no love lost between the two and many still remember how she was jeered and heckled during her winding up speech last year as a result of the AP issue.

Her remarks were quite elaborate although she did not name names.

Her strong words are unlikely to go down well with everyone but Rafidah, as those familiar with her would know, doesn't care what others think as long as she thinks she is doing the right thing.

The Puteri wing is probably the most confused group in this controversy and probably wants to stay out of it.

Mahathir-bashing was definitely not on the agenda yesterday but given the way delegates have assiduously avoided the issue, the impression is that the party is trying to sweep the issue under the carpet.

"Not really. We are taking the cue from our chief - respect for our ex-leader and full support for Pak Lah. We want to show that Pemuda is united and we want to focus on the Umno agenda," said Pulau Youth head Abdullah Mohd Yusof.

Besides, although they admit that the issue has not been good for the party, many of them see it as a personal issue, a fall-out between Dr Mahathir and Datuk Sen Abdullah Ahmad Badawi rather than a party or political issue.

It is also a lesson on the power of incumbency and a sign that the party faithful do not want the issue to drag on.