

THE STAR

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# No split if Abdullah steps down before December, says Mukhriz

**MACHANG:** A party leadership change should occur by the end of the year so that a tense contest can be avoided during the Umno annual assembly in December, said Umno Youth executive council member Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir.

He said any contest during party polls could further fracture the party. However, he said that if the change did not take place before December then wholesale contests would occur.

"Traditionally, there is no contest for the Umno presidency as the person would usually voluntarily step aside and hand over the reins to his deputy - that has always been the party tradition," Mukhriz said during a function held here yesterday to

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DATUK MUKHRIZ MAHATHIR

discuss the reasons behind the party's dismal performance in the recent general election.

"If Pak Lah (Umno president

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) contests, he may set a precedent as the first incumbent Umno president to lose," he said.

Mukhriz added that it was best for Abdullah to step down before December and hand over the presidency to Najib as it would ensure that the party would be in better shape to undergo a party election.

It would also allow the party to close ranks and go about reclaiming its political pride, which was battered when the Opposition denied Barisan Nasional its two-thirds majority in Parliament for the first time.

Mukhriz said all Umno branch members should be honest and ask Abdullah questions when he goes around meeting the grassroots.