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## Mahathir calls for open contest, says Najib 'weak'

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad took a swipe at Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak yesterday and said there should be an open contest in the Umno party elections so that vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin can go for the deputy president's post.

"There should be an open contest so that Muhyiddin can have a chance to go for deputy president ... and if he goes for deputy president and wins, then Najib should not be appointed deputy PM," he said.

This was because the party tradition has always been that the deputy president becomes the deputy prime minister.

Mahathir, who once openly supported Najib, has come down hard on him in recent days and did not mince his words when he said: "People perceive Najib as a weak leader. He has never had his own stand.

"He merely repeats words such as 'I support' and 'I am very touched' ... and people are generally disenchanted with him."

Mahathir said after opening the Malaysian Indian Muslim Congress' (Kimma) new administrative office in Sentul that Muhyiddin should be able to win if he challenges Najib in an open contest.

"If he (Najib) competes for deputy president, he would have to compete against Muhyiddin, and it is quite possible that Muhyiddin will win and Najib will lose," he said.

Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi and Najib have received endorsement from six states to defend their top two posts.

Abdullah also revealed last week he would hand over the reins to Najib in mid-2010.

"It is possible that Abdullah may not be able to manipulate the general assembly to grant a victory to Najib," said Mahathir.

"When the time comes for the PM to divest his interest in the government, Najib will not be in a position to receive this award."

He was also quick to respond when asked who he supports in the party elections. "I am not even a member of Umno so why should I (support any candidate)?" he quipped.

Muhyiddin had said in Muar on Sunday he accepted the succession plan between Abdullah and Najib.