

Muhyiddin won't rule out possible tilt for Umno presidency
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 8 — Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin today refused to exclude a potential contest for the top Umno posts later this year, saying only that he will reveal his position “when the right time comes”.

The Malaysian Insider previously reported Umno is likely to bring forward its triennial party polls to August from October to prevent issues from festering and bogging down its leadership.

Sections within Umno have urged that the president and deputy president's posts held by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Muhyiddin (picture), respectively, not be contested for fear that a tussle may lead to divisions within the party after an already bruising general election.

“As we know Umno is a democratic party. It's not the individual's right but the rights of members and party that matters. I will not comment, wait until when the right time come,” Muhyiddin was quoted as saying by state news agency Bernama at a Barisan Nasional (BN) thanksgiving function in Kundang Ulu, Johor today.

On Wednesday, former New Straits Times (NST) group editor-in-chief Datuk A. Kadir Jasin said Umno's grassroots should get to decide the fate of Najib as party president when internal polls are held at the year's end

The political commentator appeared to disagree with suggestions from state-level leaderships that the party's top two posts not be contested, saying their views must take into account that it was likely Umno's grassroots leaders and members who helped save BN from losing Election 2013.

Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad also said that it was up to Umno to decide if Najib should step down as party leader after helming BN to its worst ever electoral performance.

“We see his performance was worse than Abdullah (Ahmad Badawi). This is something I myself did not expect,” Dr Mahathir said shortly after the polls.

But the country's longest-serving prime minister also said Najib's position was likely secure for a lack of a challenger.

“I think the party will support him because of a lack of an alternative,” the 87-year-old Dr Mahathir was quoted as saying in Tokyo during a speech at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan.

And despite his call for Umno to not rule out a fight for its top two spots, Kadir also said Muhyiddin was unlikely to take aim at Najib yet.

But he did note that it was Muhyiddin and Dr Mahathir that forced Abdullah to make way for Najib in 2009, hinting that the combination may still have the same potency as five years ago.

On Thursday, Umno information chief Datuk Ahmad Maslan sought to make a case for a walkover for Najib and Muhyiddin, arguing that stability within the BN lynchpin would be welcomed by financial markets.

Today, Deputy Defence Minister Datuk Abdul Rahim Bakri urged for the same, saying: "[Open] contest for key posts in Umno will create the setting up of 'camps' and based on past experiences, it is feared, will lead to internal bickering and continuous politicking which will only weaken the party."

In 2009, a special Umno general assembly approved constitutional amendments giving 146,500 delegates the right to vote for the leadership, abolishing the quota system, simultaneous delegates meeting, and allow more women appointees.

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