

**Contest for Umno top posts best way to gauge popularity, says Rafidah
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BY YISWAREE PALANSAMY**

A contest for top party positions is the best way for the Umno leadership to gauge its strength among members, former Wanita chief Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz told The Malaysian Insider.

The veteran leader said such a move to open up all posts to challengers is the best way to uphold the party's unity and strength.

"Only then can you witness who has better leadership skills to hold the party together and make decisions in the best interest of the entire party and not their cronies," Rafidah said in a special interview.

She echoed former party deputy president Tun Musa Hitam's call that all top Umno posts should be open for contest in keeping with the basic principles of democracy.

Umno goes to the polls in October, ahead of the party's annual general assembly in December.

"The argument that if you contest, it will divide the party, is nonsense," Musa was quoted as saying by the Singapore Straits Times on Monday, adding, "That is merely a political argument that serves the incumbents or those who worry about their positions.

Dubbed as the "iron lady" in the national politics arena, Rafidah said nothing would be lost or go wrong in Umno if Musa's call was heeded.

"Like I said, if this is being done in the best interest of the party, then why must there be fear?

"In the first place, why was there even a call for no contests? Just carry on, carry on!" said Rafidah who led the Wanita Umno for 22 years.

Among those leading the call for a no contest for the party's top two posts were former Umno president Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was never challenged in Umno Baru, formed after the old Umno was declared illegal in 1988.

Dr Mahathir said that while he supported contests in the spirit of democracy, he was worried that Umno might be fragmented if there were fights for the posts of president and deputy president.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi also echoed similar calls that there should not be a contest for the party president and deputy president posts in Umno polls slated for October 5.

Zahid said the party was still in need of the guidance from its current number one and two, Datuk Seri Najib Razak, and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

Pahang Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob, however, has disagreed with the call for no contests, saying that all posts should be challenged.

"We can support Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak for the president's post. But how can the posts for the president, deputy president, Youth chief and Wanita chief all be left uncontested?" he had asked.

Adnan had said that it would not bode well for the party to call for such a move as it would show that Umno was becoming autocratic.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor, who initially said all top party posts could be contested,, took an about-turn when he stressed that the top two posts need not be contested as the party followed the principle of a "guided democracy".

This year's Umno elections would see 146,500 delegates from 161 divisions electing the party leadership.

Rafidah suggested keeping Umno intact by getting the candidates to form pacts among themselves as she had tried with her rival Datuk Seri Shahrizat Jalil on the eve of the 2008 party polls.

But it did not work out and there was a contest between the two rivals.

However, Rafidah felt that while any Umno member was free to contest positions in the party, no one should contest a post merely to test their popularity or to "test democracy".

"Also, if the top leadership is doing its job, then all should rally to support him and strengthen the party," she said alluding to Najib, who became party president in 2009.

However, Rafidah said that for the other positions, including those in the wings, there was no reason to stop anyone from contesting.

"Especially when there is a real need for change in every sense of the word," she said. - July 31, 2013.

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