

**Contest For Top Posts: Between Stability And Democracy In Umno**  
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**By Fadzli Ramli**

MELAKA, Sept 7 (Bernama) -- In view of the upcoming Umno divisional meetings next month, more and more party members and leaders have voiced out their opinions that the party president and deputy president posts need not be contested.

Three Umno vice-presidents - Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal - as well as Johor, Negeri Sembilan and Sabah Umno liaison committees, have also taken a firm stand in saying that the two top party posts should not be contested for the sake of party stability.

History has shown that in 1987 when Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah challenged Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the Umno presidency, the party was badly divided and weakened.

However, certain quarters still keen on questioning how far democracy exists in Umno if the top posts were not contested.

For political analyst, Prof Datuk Dr Zainal Kling, stability and democracy are the two important pillars in ensuring that Umno will remain strong and that the party should never have to put more priority to one than the other.

"Umno has carried out transformation to enable more of its members to choose their central-level leaders. This shows that democracy still exist in Umno.

"It is wrong to think that democracy is dead in Umno just because the president and deputy president posts are not contested. The contest for vice president posts and Supreme Council members are still on.

"However, Umno needs to ensure that the party stability comes from a system of democracy that is healthy and clean from negative elements, such as money politics," said Zainal, who holds the Tun Abdul Ghafar Baba Chair at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, when contacted by Bernama.

A total of 146,500 Umno members from 191 divisions will be involved in selecting the party president, deputy president, three vice-presidents, 25 Supreme Council members and divisional committee members in the party polls this year.

The deadline for divisional delegates meetings and candidate's registration at the central level is set on Oct 19 and Sept 28 respectively, while the Umno General Assembly is scheduled to be held from Dec 2 to 7.

Zainal said in a bid to ensure that democracy would continue to exist in Umno, all members should be responsible in selecting credible candidates to lead the party.

"Such a responsible attitude will ensure that the selected candidates are those who really want to serve the party and that attitude is also important to ensure that the polls will be held in a clean and transparent manner," he said.

Meanwhile, Malaysia Umno Veteran Club secretary Datuk Mustapha Yaakub said, in reality, it was important for the two top party posts not to be contested to prevent the recreation of Team A and Team B.

"Undeniably, in theory, democracy will look alive and beautiful if all posts are contested, but after spending years in Umno, I can say that, in reality, it is too difficult to practice democracy while preventing factionalism.

"Not that I want to refute the opinions of academicians, but we are talking about the reality of politics, not only in Umno, but all political parties in Malaysia.

"There is no such thing as a perfect party democracy. There will always be some people who are dissatisfied about certain things and they will eventually decide to break away," he said.

As such, Mustapha said to ensure that Umno will not divide, all members should agree that the top party posts need not to be contested, including the posts of vice presidents and chief of Umno Youth, Wanita and Puteri.

"The reason I said this is because when the top posts are contested, various teams will be created, from the top to the grass root levels.

"Each candidate will have their own teams. This has happened before to the extent of causing Umno to be declared illegal (in 1988). Umno veterans will not allow this to happen again," he said.

He also reminded Umno leaders to stop running on cloud nine after being able to retain power at the 13th general election (GE13).

"The GE13 is just another page in our history book now. The elected representatives should not look back at the GE13, but instead to look forward to the 14th general election and how we can strengthen our party to face the ever more challenging tasks," he added.

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