

**Mukhriz: All right to win senior post in Umno to become PM**

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**By V Anbalagan**

**However, Mukhriz Mahathir said in an interview with a foreign newspaper last year that he had no intention of becoming prime minister.**

KUALA LUMPUR: Former Umno leader Mukhriz Mahathir today told the High Court it was not immoral or wrong for him to win the party vice-president's post to eventually become Malaysia's prime minister.

Mukhriz, who was sacked from Umno last year for being critical of Najib Razak over the 1MDB issue, however, said even winning the deputy presidency was no guarantee of finally becoming the nation's prime minister.

"It is not a guarantee in even securing a post of vice-president or deputy president that one could eventually become the prime minister," he said when cross-examined by lawyer Jahaberdeen Mohamed Yunoos.

Mukhriz is the first witness in his defamation suit against Tengku Sariffuddin Ahmad, the prime minister's press secretary.

Mukhriz, who is now deputy president of PPBM, said in an interview with a foreign newspaper on April 22 last year that he had no intention of becoming prime minister.

He had also said that he did not contest the post of vice-president in 2013 with the aim of becoming prime minister.

He lost in the contest as the three vice-president posts were won by Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Shafie Apdal and Hishammuddin Hussein.

By convention, the president of Umno, the dominant party in BN, becomes the prime minister.

Mukhriz said the situation was different when the interview was given, as he was still with Umno at that point.

However, he told the court that it was not immoral or wrong for him to win the party vice-president post to eventually become prime minister.

Mukhriz said the report had said his father Mahathir Mohamad was making attempts to bring down Najib.

Asked whether there was a conspiracy between Mahathir and former Umno deputy president Muhyiddin Yassin to topple Najib, Mukhriz said: "They had similar aims."

On May 3 last year, Mukhriz, represented by Mohamed Haniff Khatri Abdulla, filed the suit over four media statements issued by Tengku Sariffuddin on April 15, 20, 23 and 26.

Mukhriz's complaint was that Tengku Sariffuddin's alleged defamatory statements painted the impression that Mahathir was grooming him to become prime minister.

The four press releases were "Prime Minister's Press Secretary's Statement on Donation Confirmation by Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister", "Prime Minister's Press Secretary's Statement on Former DPM's Reuters Interview", "Mukhriz Mahathir Statement: Response by Prime Minister's Press Secretary" and "Prime Minister's Press Secretary's Statement on Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir".

In his defence, Tengku Sariffuddin said he had never defamed Mukhriz in any of his media statements seeking to clarify issues and untruths spread about Najib.

Tengku Sariffuddin, 54, said the statements were published based on qualified privilege and without malice.

He said his media statements were made in his official capacity to prevent rumours or political allegations against the prime minister.

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