

Mahathir passes half-way mark in re-election bid

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has crossed the halfway mark to being re-elected to the pinnacle of the country's dominant party, Umno, while his only possible challenger languishes far behind.

Dr Mahathir, in power for almost two decades, had clinched 46 of the 50 nominations needed to run for the presidency of the dominant United Malays National Organisation by 8.00pm yesterday, party officials said.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk

Seri Abdullah Badawi, who Dr Mahathir wants to be his eventual successor, had also obtained 46 nominations qualifying him to vie for Umno's deputy presidency.

Both leaders yesterday received another 25 nominations each as of 8pm.

The two leaders were far ahead of former Finance Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, a 62-year-old prince who narrowly lost to Dr Mahathir 13 years ago, who had only one nomination for each post.

The Kelantan Umno chief did not receive any new nominations for either posts for the second day running.

Umno supreme council has recommended that Dr Mahathir and Abdullah be elected unopposed in the party poll on May 11.

Nominations for all Umno posts close on April 2. Leadership of Umnotraditionally carries with it the prime minister's job.

The Tanah Merah division in Razaleigh's home state of Kelantan nominated him last Friday for

both posts.

However, three other divisions in Kelantan which had been expected to back him lined up behind Dr Mahathir and Abdullah instead.

"It looks like the support everyone initially thought he had is not coming," an Umno veteran said.

Razaleigh's supporters had said he could get the required 33 nominations to run for deputy leader, mostly from Kelantan.

Abdullah has been deputy party

leader, and so number two in government, since Dr Mahathir sacked his predecessor Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in 1998.

Umno's supreme council said it does not want a contest for the two top posts because Umno needs to heal from November's elections, where it lost ground to PAS because of dissatisfaction with Anwar's ejection and imprisonment.

Anwar is in jail for corruption and standing trial for sodomy.

Meanwhile, for the three vice-

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Dr M passes half-way mark to defend presidency

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president posts, incumbent Datuk Seri Najib Razak continues to lead other contenders after obtaining another 23 nominations so far yesterday to bring his tally to 44.

Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, with 29 nominations so far, has also qualified to contest for the vice-presidency.

A minimum of 17 nominations is needed to be eligible to contest for the vice-presidency.

For the Umno Youth chief's post, Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein added another 10 nominations yesterday to bring his tally to 70, well above the 33 required to qualify to contest.

Datuk Abdul Aziz Sheikh Fadzir has the most nomi-

nations for the vice-chief's post with 55 followed by Zein Isma Ismail (12) and Mustapha Khalid (3).

In the race for Wanita Umno chief's post, Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz is ahead of incumbent Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman with 38

nominations against 26.

Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil has 38 nominations for the vice-chief's post followed by Ainon Khariyah (18) and incumbent Datuk Napsiah Omar (7). — Bernama, Reuters