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Focus now shifts to race for Umno vice-presidency

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - With Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi consolidating their leads for the top two posts in the May 11 Umno election, the focus is now on the race for the posts of vice-president.

Apart from incumbent Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Johor party chief Datuk Ghani Othman, Selangor Umno chief Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar and Sabah party chief Datuk Seri Osu Sukam today qualified to join the race for the third highest position.

Former Selangor Umno chief and Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib seems to be catching up. He received four more nominations today from Bayan Baru, Sandakan, Kuala Langat and Hulu Selangor to increase his tally to 12.

He needs five more nominations to qualify.

Until today 79 of the 165 divisions have held their meetings. All must submit nominations by April 2.

Abu Hassan has received 31, comfortably passing the qualifying mark. Today 15 divisions nominated him.

Osu Sukam touched his qualifying mark today to enable him to join the race for the vice-presidency. He received seven, bringing his tally to 22. Negri Sembilan Umno chief and Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad has so far received 16 nominations - one short of the minimum requirement. Supreme council member Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar has obtained 13 nominations so far.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim received five nominations today for the post, increasing his total to 10.

Front runner Najib, who is the Defence Minister, continued to be the favourite for the post, having received 26 nominations today, taking the total number of nominations for him to 75.

Contacted in Pekan, Pahang, Najib, who is Pekan MP, said it was still too early to comment on his chances of retaining his position, but he hoped the nominations would be translated into votes during the party elections.

Ghani received 14 nominations today, to take his tally to 45.

Pagoh Umno chief Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin today obtained the first nomination from a Johor division - Gelang Patah - for vice-presidency. The division also nominated Ghani and Najib for the post.

He received five nominations today, increasing his tally to eight.

Muhyiddin, who was Johor Umno chief and Menteri Besar, was also proposed for the vice-president's post at the Johor Baru and Parit Sulong delegates' meetings today, but members rejected the proposals.

However, all 10 divisions in Johor which met today nominated Ghani as the sole candidate from the State.

Muhyiddin, Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister, had met Dr Mahathir on Wednesday to discuss his claim that 18 or 20 divisions in Johor had been blocked by certain people from nominating him for the vice-presidency and was satisfied with the outcome of the discussion.

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