

12/05/2000

Najib, Muhammad and Muhyiddin triumph in V-P race

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib overcame two years of political uncertainty while Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin regained the post he lost in 1996 to triumph in the vice-presidential election today.

They joined runaway winner Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, the Defence Minister, who obtained 1,289 votes against Muhammad, who came in a distant second at 853 votes, and Muhyiddin, who breezed in with 813 votes.

The results were announced at 9.15pm by permanent chairman Tan Sri Sulaiman Ninam Shah, flanked by members of the party's election committee, before about 60 delegates.

The other delegates were attending a dinner hosted by the party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Commented Najib on the results: "It demonstrated that the delegates are inclined towards diversity in the composition of the supreme council."

Muhammad had a different view on the composition of the vice-presidents that uncannily reflected the Wawasan team of the 1993 party election.

"There is no Wawasan team," he insisted. "It is only co-incidental that we were all chosen."

Muhyiddin's reaction was sober. "It was hard to predict," he told reporters. "The competition was stiff but I had always prayed the delegates would give me another chance to prove my worth after I was rejected in 1996."

At a dinner he hosted for delegates at the PWTC later tonight, Dr Mahathir had this reaction to the result: "Many felt this group would win. They are the delegates' choices and we accept. Those elected must work hard."

On whether he received complaints of vote buying against the three new vice-presidents, he said: "We did not receive a single report. We will accept them."

Another uncanny fact: The three winners were also nominated by Dr Mahathir's Kubang Pasu division and Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's Kepala Batas division, leading to speculation that this team was endorsed by the top leadership.

But there was a startling outcome in the race for the 25 Umno supreme council seats - delegates did not elect a single woman candidate and the return of Johor's Datuk Shahrir Samad from political wilderness, who coasted in comfortably in 14th place.

For all the furore he caused in 1998 which led to his forced resignation as Youth chief following his fall out with the movement, Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi put up an unexpectedly strong showing to register a very high fourth place.

The top three places looked routine - it went to Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Wira Ali Rustam, former Second Finance Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed and Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali respectively.

The incumbents who failed to make the cut included Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayob, Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim, Datuk Zaleha Ismail and Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil.

In a quick analysis, 10 of the supreme council members are not in the Government. Two are Menteris Besar and one is a Chief Minister.

Penang deputy Chief Minister Datuk Dr Helmi Yahaya scraped through in last place and the distinction of being the only representative from

Penang.

But the story of the day was how Muhammad came back from the brink of political extinction since the time he won the third spot in the 1996 vice-presidential election.

He survived a 1998 trial for allegedly failing to fully declare his assets to the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA).

Muhammad had been forced to resign as Selangor Menteri Besar in 1997 and take indefinite leave from his post to stand trial in an Australian court in connection with an alleged attempt to bring out of the country an equivalent to RM2.4 million in various currencies. He was cleared of the charge.