

26/03/2000

Two more qualify for Umno vice-presidency contest

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The race for the three posts of Umno vice-president is getting more 'crowded' with two more candidates qualifying, bringing the total eligible for the May 11 election to six.

Those who qualified today were supreme council member Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar (21 nominations) and incumbent Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib (18).

Close to qualifying are Negri Sembilan Umno chief Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad, who is just one short of the 17 nominations required. Pagoh Umno chief and former vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin has a respectable 14 nominations.

Another candidate with a good chance of making it to the qualifying mark is Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim (12).

Languishing behind are Kelantan Umno liaison chief Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah with four nominations and Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali (two). Tajol Rosli has already stated he will not contest.

The others who qualified earlier are incumbent Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Johor party chief Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, Selangor Umno head Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar and Sabah Umno chief Datuk Seri Osu Sukam.

Najib is far ahead with 93 nominations, Ghani has 51, Abu Hassan 39 and Osu 26.

Since early this month, 99 of the 165 divisions have met.

The 17 divisions which met today, as expected, further emphasised the strong support for Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, with all nominating the two for the posts of president and deputy president respectively.

Dr Mahathir has 98 nominations out of a possible 99 while Abdullah has 97. One nomination - from Tanah Merah in Kelantan - for the post of president went to Tengku Razaleigh, who also had two nominations for deputy president.

Since the trend in support for Dr Mahathir and Abdullah is expected to continue, the attention had focused further on the contest for the posts of vice-presidency and Wanita head.

The two-horse race for the Wanita chief post between incumbent Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman and former head and International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz has reached an intense level.

Siti Zaharah, who earlier was lagging behind Rafidah, has slightly narrowed the gap, securing 57 nominations. Rafidah is still strongly perched to dislodge Siti Zaharah based on the 80 nominations she has secured so far.

The battle for the deputy Wanita chief post continues to be equally interesting.

Supreme council member Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil is still leading with 76 nominations. Incumbent Datuk Napsiah Omar has 20, five short of the required minimum to qualify.

However, another candidate, Ainon Khairiyah Mohd Abas, has already made it for the contest, securing 41 nominations.

The race for the Youth chief post looks set to be a foregone conclusion with acting Youth chief and Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein securing 139 nominations. The only other aspirant for the post, Raja Munir Shah Raja Mustapha from Tanjung in Penang, has succeeded in getting just one nomination.

The contest for the deputy Youth chief post looks more exciting, with four candidates being proposed thus far.

Leading is Datuk Abdul Aziz Sheikh Fadzir (105 nominations), while the other candidate who has passed the 25-nomination qualification is Zein Isma Ismail (28). Mustapha Khalid has six nominations and Zahidi Zainul Abidin one.