

Top posts under threat in Kedah

UMNO lost eight parliamentary constituencies and 13 state seats to the opposition and this has put state party leaders in an uncomfortable situation

There is a fear especially among Umno members that Kedah could be the next Malay heartland to fall into the hands of PAS as it is the only Barisan Nasional state government that does not have a two thirds majority

The poor showing by Umno the home state of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is making the party grassroots re look at the party leadership which in turn is trying to bring back calm to avoid further splits that might weaken the party

Talk was rife that there would be contests for the number one post in all divisions when the branch AGMs got under way With most branch meetings completed at least nine divisions will see contest for the division chief's post

Dr Mahathir who is Kubang Pasu chief and five others have already won their division chief's post unopposed Either because no other candidates were proposed or those nominated did not get the required 20% of the branch nominations

The others are Datuk Kadir Sheikh Fadzir (Kulim/Bandar Baru) Menteri Besar Datuk Syed Razak Syed Zain (Kuala Kedah) Arzmi Hamid (Merbok) Datuk Hamid Othman (Sik) and Ahmad Bashah Hanipah (Alor Star)

However in Merbok incumbent Arzmi Mahmood the political secretary to Tun Daim Zainuddin is expected to win although Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir the division's Youth chief had been nominated by at least 10 branches for the top post

The poor showing by Umno during the 1999 general election in Kedah is expected to have a major impact on the party division elections that starts this weekend FARID JAMALUDIN looks at the contests shaping up in the state

Mokhzani is expected to decline the nomination

Syed Razak who is state party chief kept on reminding leaders not to fight for the top post — an effort to preserve division unity

This unity Syed Razak said was important in Umno's battle against PAS which was fast spreading its influence in the state

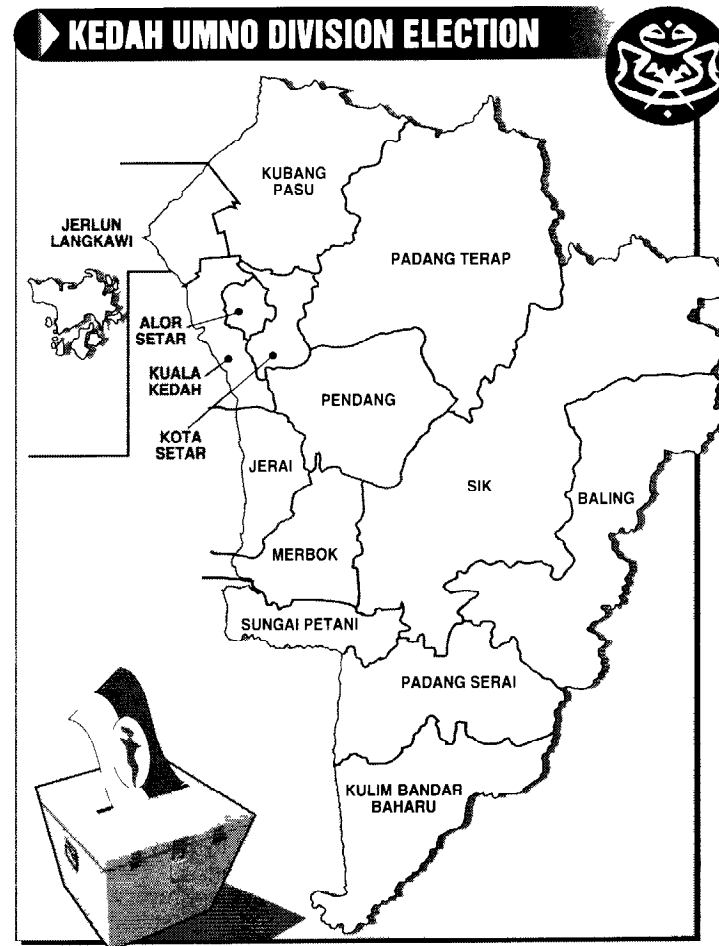
However there are some who feel that the no contest call does not mean that the present leaders can overstay as there is a lot of work to be done to restore confidence in the party

Based on nominations so far the order of the day seems to be to nominate leaders who have influence in the Government and to kill off leaders who were defeated in the 1999 general election or those who were not listed as candidates

Thus in Yan speaker Datuk Badruddin Amiruddin who lost to PAS secretary general Nasharudin Mat Isa in the general election is being challenged by his Youth chief Datuk Shuhaimi Abdullah

In Baling Datuk Raja Ariffin Raja Sulaiman a former deputy minister and left out in the last elections is being challenged by state executive councillor Datuk Zainol Abidin Mat Isa

Incumbent Pendang chief Othman Abdul a former parliamentary secretary in the Prime Minis-



ter's Department and who lost to PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor in the last elections will have to face Mohd Rozai Shafian

Rozai is said to be a prodigy of former Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid

Sanusi is also said to be fielding his men in Sungai Petani and Padang Terap

His supporter Mat Akhir Shafie

the Pantai Merdeka assemblyman is expected to join Education Ministry parliamentary secretary Datuk Mahadzir Khir and incumbent Ibrahim Mustafa in a three cornered fight for the Sungai Petani division chief's post

In Padang Terap former deputy finance minister Datuk Affifuddin Omar who is the incumbent is being challenged by the division dep-

uty Datuk Ghazali Ibrahim — another one said to be a staunch Sanusi supporter

Ibrahim and Affifuddin were dropped by Sanusi who was then the state chief in the last general election

In Jerlun Datuk Hanafi Ramli who also did not contest for a seat in the general election is facing a three cornered contest from his division deputy and vice head former state executive councillor Abdul Rahman Ariffin and Abu Hassan Shariff respectively

Sanusi himself has received eight nominations to contest the top post in Langkawi division against incumbent Datuk Abu Bakar Taib

In Pokok Sena Ahmad Lebai Sudin is squaring off against state Islamic Affairs Committee chairman Fadzil Hanafi In the 1998 party elections Ahmad Lebai topped former state executive councillor Datuk Abdul Rahman Ibrahim who is now vying for the number two post as part of Rahman's team

Syed Razak the deputy chief won the Kuala Kedah division chief's post after incumbent Datuk Zakaria Said declined nomination and pledged full support to his menteri besar

Efforts are now under way to try to get some of the contestants to withdraw as a show of unity within the party

There can be renewal of the party to regain the confidence of the people but this does not mean there must be contest

In fighting will be worse than old leaders said a Kedah Umno official whose boss is among those under threat