

Umno old guards add fireworks to veep showdown

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ANALYSIS Two of the contenders for the vice-presidency in next month's Umno elections stand out for their long but similar history: Both were former Umno vice-presidents, one a former menteri besar and the other a former chief minister.

NONE On one hand is former Malacca CM Mohd Ali Rustam, who won his vice-presidency in 2004 with the second highest number of votes.

However, he could not vie for the deputy presidency in 2008, after the Umno disciplinary board found him to have breached election rules.

Similarly, former Negeri Sembilan MB Mohd Isa Samad garnered the highest number of votes for vice-president in the 2004 party polls, but was removed from his position and suspended three years after being found guilty of money politics.

Undeterred, Isa re-contested for the post in 2008, but failed.

Come the 2013 party elections next month, the question is what their chances are of winning will be, especially with Kedah Menteri Besar Mukhriz Mahathir's announcement yesterday that he is joining the fray.

In addition, the three incumbents - Zahid Hamidi, Hishammuddin Hussein, and Shafie Apdal - have declared their intention to defend their posts, bringing the total number of contenders to six.

Speculation ran rife with Ali reported to be set to be made a senator, purported to mean that he could be persuaded to withdraw from the race.

However, sources close to Ali deny this, saying it is merely recognition of his contributions to Malacca as former chief minister.

'Ali has a formidable campaign machinery'

The sources also said Ali has a formidable campaign machinery, with grassroots support from Umno members in Malacca, Perak, Kedah and parts of Johor.

In addition, the source said his position as Perbadanan Usahawan Nasional Bhd chairperson would enable him to strengthen the Malay agenda, just as he did

when he helmed Malacca.

"His chances of winning are good. He has contested for vice-presidency before, and he has done much as Malacca chief minister, including making it a developed state. People can evaluate (his work)," the source said.

NONEBut what about Isa? Umno members consider him to be a man who never quits, one who won the 2009 Bagan Pinang by-election with a large majority, and in Jempol as well during the 2008 and 2013 general elections.

Isa has been entrusted to head Felda - the nation's largest player in the plantations industry - the settlers in which were also Umno's biggest supporters in the 13th general election.

Political observers say that position may have motivated Isa to run for the vice-presidency, but as an Umno veteran, he is also likely to have his own means and advantages to carry out his campaign.

Can these two leaders win the support of the bulk of the Umno delegates? The answer will only be known at next month's party election.

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