

**Umno nominations resume, eye on Khairy**  
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**Wong Choon Mei**

Divisional meetings resume today, with the focus still very much on the Youth chief candidates Mukhriz Mahathir, Khairy Jamaluddin and Mohd Khir Toyo.

Kicking off the day is the Pasir Puteh division, which is due to select their choice to head the Youth wing, regarded as an important test-bed for talent wishing to step into the party's top leadership.

All eyes are on Youth deputy chief Khairy - who started out as favourite in the chase for nominations - but who now trails Mukhriz.

Although his tally is only 20 nominations - half of Mukhriz's haul - he is nevertheless expected to catch up and qualify for election.

Khairy is the son-in-law of outgoing premier Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, while Mukhriz is the youngest son of former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who still wields substantial clout in the party.

"This is the Pemuda pemilihan (candidate selection), not the pertandingan (election contest), so it is not so much about a battle," said a Youth wing watcher. "It is about effecting change in the outlook of Pemuda in the run-up to the next general election which can happen sooner than expected."

"Khairy has a competitive advantage being the youngest at 32. He is well educated and not lacking in experience. Mukhriz too has his appeal, he is seen as someone less fiery, whereas Khir Toyo has his own following.

"Hopefully all three will qualify because then Pemuda, the movement, wins. Youths will have more choice from which to decide the best talent they want to represent them."

### **Between a rock and a hard place**

Elsewhere, incumbent Wanita chief Rafidah Aziz - whose cache of 52 nominations has already qualified her to stand in party election - has promised to stick with an earlier decision to step down in favour of her deputy, Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, in June next year.

wanita umno pak lah meet rafidah shahrizat event 040808Shahrizat, who has already qualified for election as the Wanita deputy chief, has also received 12 nominations for the top post.

There has been talk she may have to accede to pressure from grassroots to challenge Rafidah, if she received enough nominations for the No 1 Wanita post.

But the ease with which Rafidah has collected her nominations may make the younger woman pause for thought.

Some party watchers say the lawyer-turned-politician is now caught between a rock and

hard place especially after the supreme council's decision to postpone the annual general assembly and election by three months to March 2009.

"The difference between their transition date in June and the election in March is only three months," said a party veteran.

"There is a bit of worry Rafidah may renege on her promise to step down, now that she has so many nominations. Would she go to so much trouble just to be elected for three months? This is what Shahrizat and her supporters are wondering about."

### **New faces**

The vice-president post, which has drawn one of the largest line-ups in recent times, is also likely to see new faces voted in next year.

Second-generation Umno leader Hishammuddin Hussein, the outgoing Youth chief, has blazed past the post with 25 nominations, five more than the minimum required for election.

His colleagues, Sabah Umno deputy chief Shafie Apdal (14 nominations) and Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (13 nominations) are expected to follow soon.

Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has received nominations for the presidency from all the divisions that have made their selection so far.

He has 28 nominations to-date but needs 58 to qualify - which he is expected to achieve easily.

Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, his only contender, has still to break the egg.

For the Umno deputy presidency, International Trade and Industry Minister Muihyiddin Yassin is the frontrunner with 23 nominations and is unlikely to be overtaken by rivals, Malacca Chief Minister Mohd Ali Rustam (3 nominations) and ex-Selangor menteri besar Muhd Muhd Taib (2 nominations).

Like Najib, he is likely to romp home unchallenged at the March party election.

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