

Muhyiddin may join Najib in the safe zone
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No surprises - with several leaders making crucial gains over the last weekend to cement their candidacy and probably victory in March's Umno party elections.

The conclusion of the second weekend of nominations shed much light on the most open Umno nominations in decades, and ended the faints hopes of a few..

An interesting distraction for now is the continued discussions and dissent on the four month campaign period - after the nominations end.

Outgoing Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has expressed his discomfort with some Umno leaders still harping on the premise that a prolonged campaigning will jettison the job of governing. The March assembly date will most likely stay however, and the president to meet some of the disgruntled leaders.

Continuing with the football references, some have qualified, others are almost there, a few need some good results and a fair share have to start accepting their fate.

Presidency

Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak leads with 66 nominations.

najib on subprime crisis 300908He is only eight nominations above the minimum 58 required, but he has got every nomination available and more importantly his only outright opponent former Semangat 46 president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah has none.

Unless the Kelantanese prince launches one of the most memorable comebacks in Umno history - which is improbable. He'll have to win slightly less than half of the nominations remaining, which is an average of one of out of two.

If Tengku Razaleigh fails, Najib will take on the role of prime minister-in-waiting. The son of the second prime minister is set to be the sixth prime minister.

Deputy presidency

muhyiddin running for deputy president 101008 03International Trade and Industry Minister Muhyiddin Yassin should be breathing a sigh of relief, and probably can afford to grin a little with the 46 he has plucked.

His candidacy has been confirmed and his competitors have not made major gains over the weekend.

Melaka Chief Minister Mohd Ali Rustam has only a third of the 39 necessary, while former Selangor menteri besar Muhammad Muhd Taib stalled a little with only nine. The Melaka man was the better of the two since he made inroads into other states - winning in places like Segambut and Bandar Tun Razak (Kuala Lumpur) and Bukit Gantang, Parit Buntar,

Tapah, Ipoh Barat (Perak).

umno nominations 221008 Muhammad would be most disappointed, adding six nominations only. This weekend he has to penetrate the other states and become the national candidate. His main watch would be for the five Selangor meetings in PJ Utara, Serdang, Hulu Langat, Sabak Bernam and Ampang - a clean sweep will take him to 13 and keep him in the hunt.

He will look to the prime minister's home state to come in to lift his chances. The Penang divisions meeting this weekend are Permatang Pauh, Bukit Mertajam and Jelutong.

Vice-president Ali - who must rely heavily on other states to keep himself in the race - has probably already counted the Tangga Batu and Jasin division support, even if they meet on Sunday.

The Segambut nod last week might be an indicator he might notch up Setiawangsa too on Saturday. He would be disappointed that Gopeng is the only Perak division scheduled a meeting this weekend for now, as he has been doing well there.

If Muhyiddin wins all the nine Johor nominations - Labis, Tanjung Piai, Johor Bharu, Pulai, Sri Gading, Simpang Renggam, Parit Sulong, Sembrong and Kluang - and a substantial number of the other nominations, both Ali and Muhammad will be running out of divisions to scrape from.

If neither the Melaka or Selangor man reaches the half-way mark of 20 this weekend, then they both might consider settling for a supreme council seat.

The weekend will definitely shed light on if either candidacy is still viable.

Vice-presidency

hishammuddin hussein pc 030408 01 In a crowded field Najib's cousin, Hishammuddin Hussein has 54 nominations which is 10 more than fellow Johorean Muhyiddin's deputy presidency tally.

This is also making him the clear-cut favourite to win in March. Which renders the rest of the competition to focus on winning as many nominations as possible - even if they have already gained the necessary 20 - so that they increase their elect-worthiness in March.

Traditionally this is the most competitive position in Umno and there is never shortage of surprises.

shafie apdal and mps no defection pc 280808 01 Shafie Apdal is almost an equal favourite with Hishammuddin in terms of sentimentality - for being the flag-bearer for Sabah. He'll continue to bring in the nominations.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Ahmad Zahid Hamidi - who is in second place - and Higher Education Minister Khaled Nordin the other confirmed candidates will keep wooing for support, for they have March in mind.

Khaled would be the more pensive, since he is the second Johor candidate confirmed, and if Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar keeps his momentum, there will be a third Johor candidate.

It is highly unlikely that Umno delegates will vote an unprecedented three Johor vice-presidents in - they have never done so for any of the states. So Khaled will seek to have a comfortable lead over Syed Hamid even if the Kota Tinggi MP meets the minimum this weekend - as a psychological and PR edge.

The last time delegates voted in two - not three - vice-presidents from the same state was in 1991- a nostalgic combo of opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim and the present prime minister.

The trailing group - Dr Rais Yatim, Mohd Isa Samad, Abdul Rahim Thamby Chik, Shahidan Kassim Jamaluddin Jarjis - have a weekend of reckoning ahead of them. Having between four to six nominations now, they have to gain traction now.

suhakam religion culture conference 090906 rais yatim speakOf the five, Foreign Minister Rais should be tentative about the weekend - as he has come out strong against the culture of vote-buying in the party.

Perhaps the former Negeri Sembilan menteri besar expects the shame to produce an upswing of votes for him. It's a gamble, since Umno members don't like to be chided in public.

It might be a desperate tactic since his six votes have been disparate - Kimanis, Semporna, Pagoh, Jelebu, Cheras, and Gombak - coming from five different states.

Shahidan Kassim - former Perlis menteri besar - is in a similar predicament in his spread and having a small home base. His six nominations are from four states. Still chief liaison for Perlis, but without control of his state or a ministership he will have to rely on his grassroots appeal if he is to legitimately persuade support.

Both Isa Samad and Abdul Rahim Thamby Chik - six and four nominations respectively - are in the same boat. They were heads of bordering states and tarnished by scandals, but now have returned to the fray.

The votes they win might be a clear gauge of how much reform zeal there truly is through the rank and file of the party.

The divisions to watch: Hulu Trengganu, Dungun, Sik, Beaufort, Bera, Gopeng, Permatang Pauh and all the Selangor and Kuala Lumpur divisions.

Wanita chief

There is little to discuss here except that every nomination from now on for deputy chief Shahrizat Abdul Jalil is a plea for her to fight for the chief position - with every chance of winning the post. Incumbent Kuala Kangsar MP Rafidah Aziz would be squirming uncomfortably in her seat.

rafidah and shahrizat 070904The gap between the two is 39 - Rafidah's 79 to Shahrizat's 40 - and if the gap stays or reduces in the nominations remaining, the former MP for Lembah Pantai might just have to contest to appease a clear call for change in the wing. If not she risks alienating a large support base which is firmly behind her for now.

The supply line of former Puteri leaders like Tourism Minister Azalina Othman Said will make a beeline for the leadership quicker if Shahrizat does not show leadership mettle this time around.

Youth chief

mukhriz mahathir gaza fund 010208 smiles Mukhriz Mahathir is officially the favourite for the youth chief post and outgoing chief Hishamuddin's deputy Khairy Jamaluddin has to play catch from now on.

His father may have quit the party but Mukhriz has emerged a favourite with the young wing - with the 62 nominations so far, through the 127 division meetings. That is almost half the nominations decided.

The race started with expectations that all three - Mukhriz, Khairy and former Selangor menteri besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo - would have an equal chance, with Khairy shading it.

Now the Jerlun MP has surged ahead, the game will all be about matching Mukhriz.

khairy jamaluddin announce umno youth top post challenge 170908 01 Khairy is two shy of the 39 minimum, so probably by tomorrow he will have his candidacy sealed. The story is not so straight forward for Khir who needs to muster 11 more from the remaining 64 divisions remaining.

That would be asking him to get a sixth of the remaining divisions, but there might be complications. Independent whispers may emerge - in a party apt to campaign in whispers - that Mukhriz would have less trouble dispatching Khairy if it is a two way fight, not a three way fight.

The 'we don't want Khairy' faction might just shore up the Mukhriz count only and hope Khir does not make it to the March vote.

Yet the Selangor man - with a past with a broom - will survive.

The clump of Selangor divisions left to meet are likely to edge Khir past the 30 nomination figure easily, and with his clear and consistent messages - he is far more persuasive a speaker in Malay than the other two in the field - it is unforeseeable for the Selangor opposition leader not to make the cut.

Week three

The youth divisions are close to ending, but the main divisions still have not reached the halfway mark. With 125 divisions still undecided, the contests for deputy president and vice-president will be the focal point, especially if all three youth chief aspirants reach their minimum this weekend.

Three more weekends remain, however by Monday we should be able to ascertain if there will be a contest for deputy president and predict if the vice-president field will be crowded or not.

The sideline attractions continue however - on what Shahrizat will comment on her

continuing nominations for wanita chief, whether she will ask her constituents to stop nominating her. Or if Tengku Razaleigh grabbing an odd nomination bring back the highlight on the presidential contest.

And if many of these intrigues are sorted out by Sunday evening then the attention will shift to the actual contest in March.

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