

# Setting the tone for party's future

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**DATUK HARUN TAIB**, the 63-year-old ulama, is the longest serving Pas assemblyman after party spiritual leader Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat. He has two degrees — in Usuluddin and Syariah from Madinah University, Saudi Arabia, and in Syariah from Al-Azhar University in Egypt — and a Master's degree in Islamic politics from Al-Azhar.

Today's contest between incumbent Nasharudin Mat Isa and Datuk Harun Taib for the Pas deputy presidency is billed as a joust between the reformers and conservatives, the outcome of which could set the tone for the Islamic party in the next general election. **ZUBAIDAH ABU BAKAR** speaks to both of them as they prepare for the ballot

for Islam, the party and, of course, for the nation.

**Q:** Why have you decided to contest in the election?

**A:** I am only fulfilling the wishes of party members. I had always rejected nominations in the past.

**Q:** Is there no other reason that you are challenging the incumbent?

**A:** You will have to find the reasons why there was no other nomination for the deputy presidency during the late Datuk Yusuf Rawa's presidency and the late Datuk Fadzil Noor was his deputy. There was also none when Fadzil became president and Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang was deputy. When Abdul Hadi became president and Hassan Shukri was deputy and now Nasharudin, there were challengers nominated. You should ask party members why this is so.

**Q:** Supporters of some candidates are campaigning via SMS. What is your comment?

**A:** This is the age of technology. Campaigning is probably being done by supporters, not the person who is contesting. But that is their right; maybe they want to exchange opinions among friends.

**Q:** So you do not campaign?

**A:** No, I don't. There were people asking me whether I was contesting. But I did confirm to the central committee at its meeting on Wednesday about my candidacy.

**Q:** Some say it is inappropriate for both president and deputy president to come from Terengganu, which will happen if you win.

**A:** I don't know about that. What I know is that the divisions that nominated me are not from Terengganu alone.

**Q:** Will there be problems if the party president and his deputy come from the same state?

**A:** This has happened before in Pas. Dr Baharuddin Helmi and his deputy Dr Zulkifi Muhammad were both from Perak.

**NASHARUDIN MAT ISA**, 45, has a Master's degree in comparative law from the International Islamic University of Malaysia where he was a lecturer for three years until 1997. He then taught law at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia until 1999 when he was appointed Pas secretary-general. He won the Yan parliamentary seat in the general election that year. Two years ago, he

defeated incumbent Hassan Shukri for the deputy presidency.

**Q:** Is there unhappiness in Pas over the present leadership?

**A:** I am not really sure about the members. We do not know exactly how many nominations we received, so we cannot gauge the mood. This is a development that accords with the party constitution, only it has been blown out of proportion by the media. We have had contests before.

**Q:** Do you agree with claims that the changes the Young Turks brought about have been ineffective and that certain groups in the party are against them?

**A:** I did not see any opposition to the changes we have brought about. You cannot satisfy everybody in a big organisation like Pas. I think you should do what is right

**Q:** Some of the old-timers in Pas say they want a more senior deputy president because they are looking for someone to be the future party president. Do you think age matters?

**A:** I do not think this is a big issue. I became the deputy president when I was 43, yet members still pinned their hopes on me. Anyway, I am not getting any younger.

**Q:** There are views in Pas that you lack the experience to hold such a high position.

**A:** Experience develops through your participation in the whole process. Nobody comes in or takes a post or becomes a leader without experience. What is the interpretation of experience? It is a very subjective thing.

**Q:** How do you view the ongoing campaigning? Will it affect party unity?

**A:** I cannot deny that campaigning has been going on through the latest technology, the Internet and SMS. It is a development in the party that is nothing to shout about. I would be concerned if the content involved personal attacks. You cannot stop technology.

**Q:** Is there a rift between the senior and younger leaders?

**A:** I do not see a rift. There are different thoughts and ideas but when these are brought up during meetings, they will be debated. Debate is open in Pas. When we arrive at a decision, it is a collective one.



Harun Taib

Nasharudin Mat Isa