

Young Turks fend off challenge

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■ **Reports by Zubaidah Abu Bakar and Abdul Razak Ahmad**

KOTA BARU: Pas' Young Turks appear to have fended off a strong challenge from the party's old guard to retain control of the party.

Official results for Friday's party elections are expected today. But sources said incumbent deputy president Nasharudin Mat Isa managed to defend his position against challenger Datuk Harun Taib.

Two of the three incumbent vice-presidents aligned to the Young Turks — Kelantan's Datuk Husam Musa and party activist Mohamad Sabu — also appear to have held on to their posts.

A third incumbent, Datuk Dr

Hassan Ali, had earlier pulled out of the race. His place looks set to be taken by party information chief and senior ulama Ahmad Awang.

This year's elections have been billed as a clash between the Young Turks and old guards. The Young Turks led by Nasharudin swept the last party elections two years ago on promises of making Pas more progressive.

The ousted band of older conservatives, led by Harun, had fought to preserve the party's heritage, especially its Islamic state ambitions.

The high stakes made polling a tightly administered affair from the start. The counting of ballots for the deputy presidency was conducted by Pas election unit head Dr Daeng Sanusi Daeng

Mariok and his deputy Datuk Wan Abdul Mutalib Embong to prevent leaks.

The elections have been nail-biting. The conservatives, all but written off in the last elections, mounted a surprisingly robust challenge this time around.

Aside from the candidacy of the widely respected archconservative Harun, who is the second most senior Pas ulama after *mursyidul am* (spiritual leader) Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, the group offered delegates a choice of three vice-presidential candidates.

Of the three, only Ahmad, a former leader of Persatuan Ulama Malaysia from Perak, seems to have made it.

Ulama candidates and those aligned to conservatives in the Youth and Muslimat (wom-

en's) wings scored major wins in their elections held on Thursday.

But by yesterday afternoon, it became apparent that what the delegates really wanted was not to overthrow the Young Turks and install a more traditionalist leadership — which observers feared would have put Pas in reverse gear into hardline territory — but to maintain what they felt was a healthy balance of power in Pas.

This was reflected in the debates. Several speakers urged both factions to work together to ensure the party remained united.

Representatives from Pahang went so far as to propose that the concept of ulama leadership in Pas be widened into a more inclusive "Islamic"

leadership policy in which a Pas leader, ulama or professional, would gain legitimacy as long as he fulfilled party requirements regarding Islam.

Judging by the tone and unofficial results, it would appear that the balance of power remained with the Young Turks. But there were signs of a lingering rivalry.

Kedah delegate Phahrolrazi Mohd Zawawi said that perhaps it was time for Pas to consider sponsoring the establishment of a new political party to reach out to non-traditional groups like non-Muslims.

This was seen as a veiled attack on the Young Turks' "engagement" policy which aimed to do the same.

Phahrolrazi also asked how much money was spent to ac-

quire and equip the new Pas headquarters.

The new HQ, situated in Jalan Raja Laut, Kuala Lumpur, was a pet project of the Young Turks, which some conservatives had openly criticised as a waste of party funds.

Selangor delegate Mohd Nasir Yusof was prompted to respond to Phahrolrazi for trying to "belittle" the professionals.

He also took offence to the Kedah delegate's questions about the new headquarters, which he bluntly said were akin to demeaning the present leadership.

Nasir said the new offices symbolised Pas' rise from a kampung party to one that was ready to win support from a wider community.