

Not a single hint from Hadi

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PAS polls results is anybody's guess

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KOTA BARU: The presidential speech by Datuk Seri Hadi Awang at the PAS *muktamar* was quite eagerly awaited.

There is a closely matched contest for the party's No. 2 post and his audience was keen to get hints of his preference - incumbent Nasruddin Mat Isa or challenger Datuk Harun Taib, the outgoing Dewan Ulama head.

But Hadi is not a political creature and his speech was, according to VIP guest Annuar Tahir, "perfectly neutral".

The president's speech took the usual order - the global picture, the national situation, party and political affairs and, finally, the state of the *ummah* (the Muslim community).

He gave equal weight when acknowledging the achievements of the Ulama, Pemuda and Muslimat wings (respectively, the religious scholars, the youths and the women).

He kept to the middle path, which was significant, given that he had drafted the speech himself this year. In past assemblies, a committee drafted the policy speech, with Hadi claiming editing rights and the final say.

A committee member said: "I told him, you are a writer and orator. Why don't you write it this year? He just smiled and he did it."

Hadi, a former Terengganu *mentri besar*, had to be neutral because Harun is a long-time ulama friend and both come from the same state, while Nasruddin has been a loyal and capable deputy over the last two years.

However, supporters of the two men read the president's speech differently.

A senior ulama and a Harun supporter said Hadi had stressed the need to strengthen the ulama leadership and had praised them for bringing about important changes. That meant he favoured Harun.

But a professional rooting for Nasruddin pointed out that the president had mentioned that PAS' success was due to the ulama being assisted by professionals, intellectuals and grassroots leaders.

"Hadi commended members with Western educational values joining the party to work with the ulama," said the professional.

The keen contest for the No 2 post at this year's *muktamar* has even overshadowed the general election focus.

The Pemuda and Muslimat polls on

»I hope they will support the team that can take the party into the future«

PARTY INSIDER

Thursday also threw many off-balance, when a large number of conservatives won their posts.

Many thought the two wings, which comprise more young people than the parent body, would have been more inclined towards the professional group.

Instead, the bulk of those who made it into the Pemuda executive committee were the "ulama muda", the youths educated in religious schools and those who have had some education in West Asia.

The new Muslimat chief and her deputy are also conservatives associated with Harun's wife, who used to head the women's wing.

The delegates attending the main *muktamar* which began yesterday are an older and often more conservative lot than the youth and women wings.

As such, supporters of Nasruddin have reason to be worried.

But a party insider insisted that the election of the central leadership was a different ballgame.

"They are older but they are also more mature. I hope they will support the team that can take the party into the future," said the insider.

Spiritual adviser Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat seemed a little under the weather yesterday. He did not join the other leaders at the packed press conference and left shortly after the coffee break.

The top ulama has made no secret of his disquiet over the contest but has not tried to stop it.

Voting began after Friday prayers and the results will be announced tomorrow.

Today will see delegates debating on the president's speech. The tone of their debate could provide a hint of which way the election will go.