

# It's crunch time for Pas Young Turks

A showdown between the Pas Young Turks and a band of conservative old guard appears to be shaping up in the party polls next month. At stake is control of the party and the future direction it will take, writes **ABDUL RAZAK AHMAD**

NST-20/5/2007

FOR a Pas member nominated to contest in the party's election next month, silence literally speaks louder than words.

Nominations for party positions — made by party divisions — closed on Tuesday. Letters informing those who made the cut have been sent out by the party election committee.

While those not interested to contest are required to write back to the committee by Tuesday next week, those planning to run merely need to keep mum.

A failure to reply to the committee is taken as an acceptance of candidacy, and the silence in this year's Pas election seems especially loud.

There are indications that the coming polls scheduled on June 1-3 in Kota Bharu is going to be a hot one. A lively challenge appears to have shaped up against the Young Turks who swept to power in the last party elections two years ago.

Heated contests could break out in the Youth wing right up to the post of deputy president held by Nasharudin Mat Isa.

It was Nasharudin who led a team of urbane, mostly 40-something party leaders to victory in the last party elections, promising to "repackage" Pas — often labelled ultra conservative and unflinching in its aim to establish an Islamic state — as a more inclusive party.

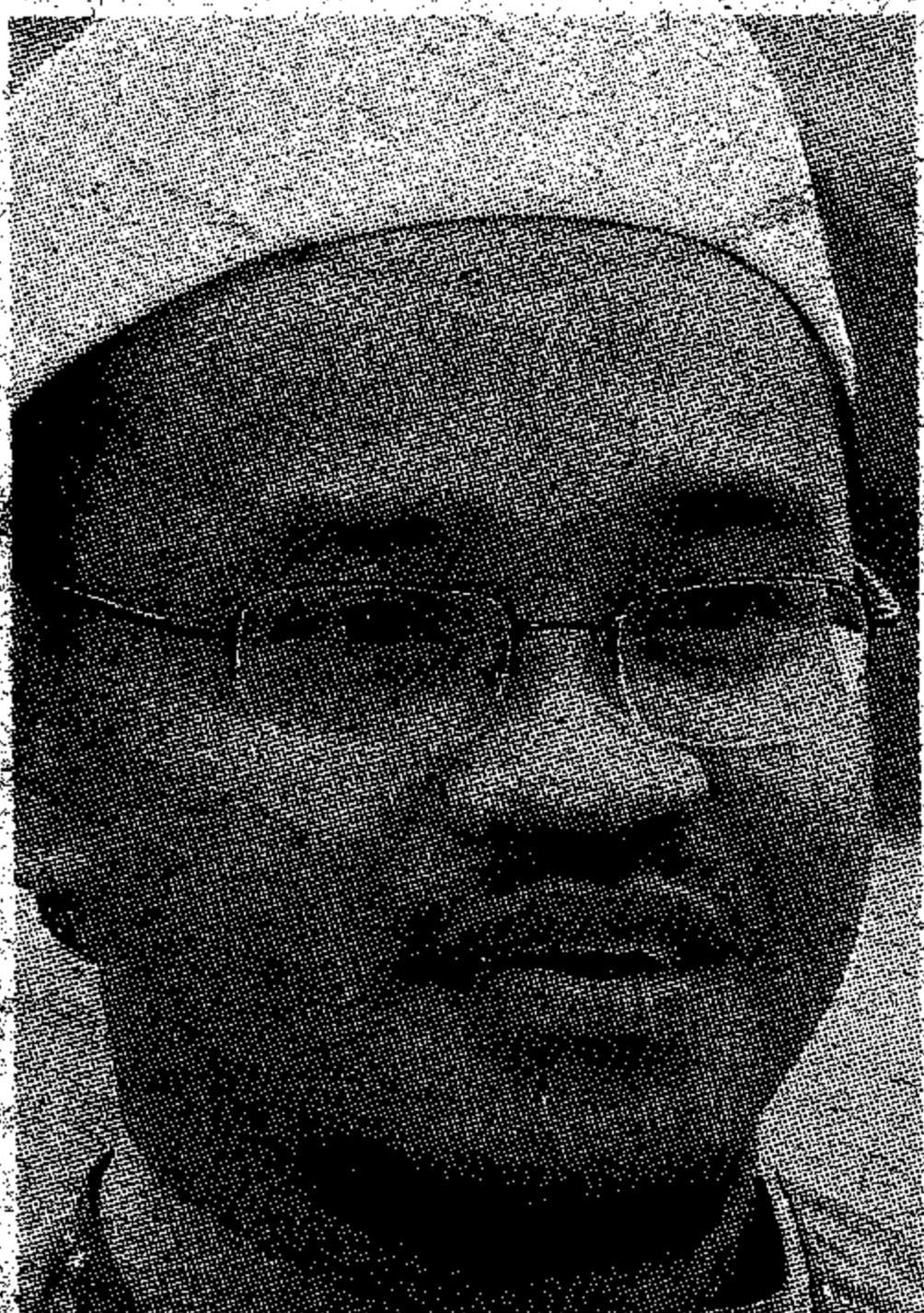
There's still no official word on the nominations. It's understood though that the likely challenger grabbing most of the attention is Datuk Harun Taib, head of the party's ulama wing.

Harun, two years ago, threw the ulama wing's support behind party stalwart Hassan Shukri for the deputy presidency. Shukri, a senior Pas figure, lost to Nasharudin.

This time around, the talk is that Harun has received some measure of support in terms of nominations from several states to run for the post himself.

A contest is also likely to occur for the leadership of the Youth movement.

The movement's current number two, Idris Ahmad, is said to have received nominations to contest the Pas Youth



Nasharudin Mat Isa is defending his post as party deputy president



Salahuddin Ayub may face a challenge from his No 2 for the Youth chief post



Mujahid Yusuf says current leaders have not fully lived up to expectations

chief post which is now held by Salahuddin Ayub, a prime mover of the Young Turks' re-branding agenda.

Party sources, though, say Salahuddin appears to remain a popular choice, having secured the support from two-thirds of the states.

The deputy Youth chief's post that Idris currently holds has also seen two other possible contenders nominated.

A fight for party posts isn't a new phenomenon in Pas.

That the party leaders decided to go ahead despite a possible snap general election and the potential rift that a jostle for posts could bring, shows confidence that the contests will not get out hand.



Datuk Harun Taib is a likely challenger for the party's deputy presidency

But even then, this year's election is, as party central committee member Mujahid Yusuf puts it, definitely "more interesting".

"For the past two years, it was the Young Turks who were seen to be leading the party.

"They've had two years (to perform), so the question is whether their leadership has really had an impact on the grassroots," says Mujahid, who is the son of former Pas president Datuk Yusuf Rawa.

One setback for the Young Turks is that their ability to deliver in a general election has been untested, as the next round isn't due until 2009.

Their track record would

also appear to be inconclusive in the three by-elections they've overseen since the last party election.

Kelantan's Pengkalan Pasir by-election saw Pas losing by a narrow 134 votes to Barisan Nasional. Pahang's Batu Talam by-election was boycotted by Pas and Parti Keadilan Rakyat; while the most recent by-election in Ijok saw Pas helping the PKR which failed to wrest the seat.

It's a showing that doesn't seem as strong as many of the Young Turks' immediate predecessors, who were voted to power in the party's May 1999 election.

The general election held in November that year saw Pas scoring one of its best performances, in which it wrested Terengganu from the BN.

Theirs is the benchmark the current lineup is inevitably being judged against, which must seem like a tough act to follow.

"Some are unhappy, not all," says Mujahid. "There are perhaps areas where the current leaders have not fully lived up to expectations, and I wouldn't blame the grassroots."

Mujahid explains that what he feels is the sentiment in the party.

"In the last party election, the feeling was 'let's give these guys a chance'.

"Now, after two years, it's 'we're not seeing the kind of results we expected', so it would seem that some members feel like the current team hasn't delivered."

The bigger question for delegates is whether the path the Young Turks are leading Pas on — a more inclusive approach that favours, among others, engagement with non-Muslims and target groups like youths by holding concerts and other social activities that conform to Islamic requirements — is the right one.

"The contests this time around come in part from concern by some that the direction Pas is heading in is unclear," says Pas insider Mohd Sayuti Omar.

Sayuti believes that the party's young leaders — despite adopting strategies different

# 'Roadblocks' make it hard to take new direction

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from those used by the party seniors when building public support for the party — are ultimately working towards the same goals as the older set.

"But some people in Pas are so rigid they're unable to accept any compromise when fighting for the party cause.

"So, there's a gap between the younger leaders and some of the more conservative members, who

are now trying to put up 'roadblocks' hoping to 'save' the party out of the fear that Pas may stray from its original aims," says Sayuti.

The Young Turks on their part argue that their performance has been up to par.

"We are proving ourselves. We're projecting Pas on a national stage and showing that Pas is still relevant and capable of playing its role," says Salahuddin.

"As for Pas Youth, this past two years has seen us successfully imple-

menting the policy of engagement with the various groups in society so that we can reach out to a larger audience."

Some, meanwhile, feel it's still too early to make a thorough assessment of what Pas' Young Turks will ultimately be able to pull off.

"What's important is that Pas is moving, and there has been no drop in performance or critical problems over the past two years," says Nasrudin Hassan, who has led Pahang Pas Youth for the past seven years.

For all the changes promised by the Young Turks, a Nasharudin defeat — in the event that a contest for the deputy presidency occurs — would signal the grassroots' rejection of the direction the party young leaders have been trying to steer Pas to.

By convention, it's the party number two who goes on to later assume the top spot in Pas.

Whoever the deputy president of Pas will turn out to be after June 3, he will generally be seen as the grassroots-endorsed successor to the

president.

It remains to be seen how widespread the contests will eventually turn out to be, how many of the nominated candidates will pull out, and whether the party leadership will need to step in to negotiate compromises and avoid overheated contests.

The one certainty now is that when it comes to Pas' Young Turks, crunch time has arrived.

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