

Mukhriz likely to go for Umno VP post, upsetting party call for status quo
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In the past few days, Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak has been sending out feelers to party delegates and power brokers: he would like the current slate of Umno vice-presidents to be returned at the upcoming party polls.

But this neat plan of helping Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal and Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein retain their positions is likely to be muddled with Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir (pic, below) almost certain to decide tonight on putting his name in for one of the three vice-presidents' slots.

Sources told The Malaysian Insider that Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's son is meeting Kedah party chieftains today and will later make an announcement about his ambitions in the party.

His decision to enter the fray will put Najib in an uncomfortable position. If the current party president stays neutral, it is likely that his cousin, Hishammuddin, could be a loser when votes are tallied.

If his aides and operatives continue making the rounds and indicating that he wants the status quo, he could upset the Dr Mahathir camp.

In recent weeks, bloggers aligned to the former prime minister have been talking up Mukhriz's chances of securing one of the three vice-presidential slots, which is seen as a step closer to being at the top of the party leadership.

The 48-year-old became Kedah menteri besar after winning a state seat in the May 5 general election and pro-Umno bloggers feel that he should take a shot at the vice-presidency or lose out in seniority to other upcoming leaders in Umno.

Others in the running to be vice-presidents are Felda chairman Tan Sri Isa Samad and former Malacca chief minister Datuk Seri Ali Rustam, although the latter is said to have been offered a senatorship and a plum corporate post to withdraw from the race.

Ali was knocked out of the deputy president's race in the last party elections in 2009 after claims of money politics.

But Dr Mahathir has said the party needs renewal and younger leaders, in what is seen as a call to party veterans to allow Mukhriz and those his age to move up in the party.

It is understood that Najib has also been talking about renewal and the need for younger leaders to step up although he has thrown his tacit support behind the likes of Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil to keep their party posts.

Party insiders say the race is also heating up for the supreme council posts as it is seen as a stepping stone to higher posts and also to influence key party decisions before the next general election.

"For the first time ever, people have to sign up for the contests instead of being nominated.

So that means more mavericks and more headaches for those in top posts.

"The bigger slate of choices will throw up many interesting results that can either work for the current leadership or work against them," a party insider told The Malaysian Insider.

He added that leaders like Mukhriz and Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin have a better chance of winning the elections due to their youth and intellect.

"The party needs them to move forward because the old leaders have no idea how to tackle the future," he said.

"But Najib wants to keep his team, and his cousin. So that's a problem there," he added.

Nominations are on September 28 while the elections are on October 19. The party's assembly will be held in December 2013. - September 17, 2013.

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