

In Umno polls, race is for vice-presidencies, supreme council seats
Malaysian Insider
Sept 6 , 2013
By EILEEN NG

The real race in this year's Umno polls is for the three vice-presidencies and a seat in the supreme council, with the top two positions almost certain to be retained by party president Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his deputy Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

Party insiders attribute the crowded race for these posts to the possibility that the next party election three years down the road could offer a new leadership before the country's 14th general election.

"Everyone is preparing for a leadership change in the next polls, so they have to position themselves now," an Umno warlord told The Malaysian Insider in Kuala Lumpur.

Nominations for the various posts are on September 28 while the party elections are slated for October 19. The party general assembly is in early December.

"Najib and Muhyiddin might stay on for the next general election but after that, it will be the ones who are vice-presidents and supreme council members to take charge of the party," the warlord added.

Another warlord said this was reflected in the challenge to the three incumbent vice-presidents - Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal - who have confirmed they are defending their posts by forming alliances.

Their challengers are Tan Sri Isa Abdul Samad (pic) and Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam, with Datuk Seri Musa Aman the only one who has yet to openly declare his candidacy.

Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir is also said to be weighing his options in the vice-presidential race where almost 150,000 members are set to vote in top office bearers, following voting amendments.

Prior to the last party election and amendments to its constitution in 2009, only some 2,500 delegates had voting rights.

Hishammuddin had said alliances were part of a growing awareness by members to strengthen Umno by banding together to put the interests of the party ahead of individuals.

"As Umno vice-president, the cooperation among myself, Zahid and Shafie has always been very close... if it is beneficial to the party, then it should be continued," Hishammuddin had said.

Forming alliances will enable the candidates to leverage on each other's strength and support, but it will not guarantee them a win.

Kedah Umno secretary Datuk Othman Aziz said being part of a group will not guarantee a win as members look for visionary, reliable and trustworthy leaders that can lead the party into the next phase.

"Delegates are smarter nowadays. I don't think they will vote according to bloc or grouping. Instead, they will look for individual attributes that will ensure the party continues to survive in the next general election and beyond," he said.

Of the six candidates, party observers noted that Ahmad Zahid is a shoe-in because of his popularity with the grassroots and his two running mates are hoping this will rub off on them as well.

However, Isa and Mohd Ali should not be written off despite having baggage as both are also well-liked for their friendly, down-to-earth demeanour.

Isa was found guilty and suspended for money politics in 2005 while Mohd Ali was barred from contesting in 2009 after he was found to have violated party election regulations.

Since being appointed as Felda chairman two years ago, Isa has been working the ground hard as Felda settlers constitute a huge votebank for Umno and by extension, for Isa as well.

Mohd Ali, who was a former vice-president from 2004 to 2009, might gain "sympathy votes" since he lost the Bukit Katil parliamentary seat to PKR in the last general election.

"While it's possible for candidates to team up, it looks like the incumbents have more chances than the challengers if results of the GE13 are anything to go by," noted Sabah UiTM political analyst Dr Arnold Puyok. - September 6, 2013.

Hakcipta © 2013 The Malaysian Insider

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/in-umno-polls-race-is-for-vice-presidencies-supreme-council-seats>