

## **Umno also has succession issues, says analyst**

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### **Report highlights lack of strong candidate in ruling party to take over from Najib Razak, should he decide to step down as prime minister, Umno president.**

PETALING JAYA: The opposition are not the only ones with a succession problem, according to a commentator on Channel NewsAsia (CNA).

Norshahril Saat, a fellow of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, says there are a few possible candidates to succeed Prime Minister Najib Razak should he decide to step down as Umno president but nothing is firm.

“Within the Umno ranks, the question remains who will succeed Najib if he decides to step down. His current deputy Ahmad Zahid Hamidi is currently 64 years old. The other candidate, Hishammuddin Hussein, is 55,” the report in the CNA website said.

Hishammuddin, who is Umno vice-president, is currently defence minister and was recently appointed as minister with “special functions” in the Prime Minister’s Office. He is also a first cousin of Najib.

With most of the ministerial pool from Umno being in a similar age bracket or older, the name of Youth and Sports Minister Khairy Jamaluddin naturally comes up as a potential successor, should the party want a more robust change in the ranks.

With Khairy dubbed by some to be the “ideal prime minister, being intelligent, popular” and with a strong following among youths, CNA says the 41-year old needs to just “rally the divided party and bypass the old guard”.

“Khairy, who is former Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi’s son-in-law, may have to ‘do a Mahathir’.

“In 1976, when Hussein Onn (Hishammuddin’s father) became prime minister, Mahathir was appointed his deputy even though there were other senior Umno leaders. This was because Mahathir was widely known to be the previous prime minister Abdul Razak’s protégé,” said Norshahril, who is a political analyst on Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

He added that since then, Umno has not seen the fulfillment of a succession plan in a similar fashion with a young leader being groomed by the party chief to take over and eventually becoming prime minister.

Mahathir was prime minister from 1981 to 2003. He was succeeded by Abdullah, who then stepped down in 2009 after a tempestuous rule, with Mahathir eventually turning against him and helping elevate Najib to take over.

### **Pakatan Harapan**

Writing about the political leaders in the opposition whose names have been touted as potential prime minister, should the Pakatan Harapan coalition win the next general election (GE14), the commentator suggests more needs to be done.

“The names proposed so far – Mahathir, Anwar and Muhyiddin – suggest the country is facing a pressing problem of leadership renewal within the opposition. Not enough effort has been exercised to accelerate young leaders into important, grooming positions in the party.

“The opposition may argue that disunity within their ranks has forced them to turn to these senior politicians for guidance. However, this may be counterproductive, because these old guards have been fighting one another for decades.

“Their quick reconciliation only suggests that pragmatism supersedes ideology, for now,” Norshahril said.

He added that the time has come for the opposition to give their younger politicians more prominence in GE14, with the old guards to consider not running for any seat.

“In their campaigns, they should also clarify their parties’ succession plans for leadership renewal.

“Malaysians are keen to see who will make the next generation of leaders in the country. They are tired of seeing the old guards fight one another on issues from the previous decade.

“The suggestion that Mahathir lead the opposition coalition only reinforces these feelings.”

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