

NAJIB'S FORK-TONGUE SHOWS AGAIN: UMNO TALKS OF REJUVENATION YET OLDIES GET PLUM JOBS AT EXPENSE OF NEW BLOOD

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The recent appointments of Tan Sri Annuar Musa, 59, as Umno information chief, and Datuk Seri Ahmad Bashah Md Hanipah, 65, as Kedah menteri besar, have raised doubts whether one of the oldest parties in the country is truly committed to rejuvenating itself.

The two stalwarts are taking over the duties of younger colleagues, Datuk Ahmad Maslan, 49, and Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir, 51, respectively.

Umno's decision to replace both Ahmad and Mukhriz with older leaders indicates that internal politics trumps the changes it must make to stay relevant among the younger generation.

In a party where the Youth chief himself is 40 and sporting a greying beard, Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak has time and again stressed the need to rejuvenate itself and attract the young.

“Umno and Najib specifically have been saying about it (rejuvenation) for quite some time but they lack the political will to do so,” said Professor Dr Arnold Puyok, a political science lecturer from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

“I don't think Najib has totally abandoned the idea of ‘peremajaan Umno’ (rejuvenation). He is just being cautious as doing so will put him in a collision course with the old guards.”

In fact, as far back as 2014, Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin said older Umno leaders were unhappy with Najib's call for rejuvenation as they believed it would pit them against their younger counterparts.

He said the “noble proposal” that would help Umno win elections could be a “ticking time-bomb” instead.

But Puyok said that if Umno wanted to win elections, rejuvenation should be its top priority.

“Time is not on Najib's side. He needs to quickly revitalise Umno and get more young blood to attract more young voters.”

And despite the scandals swirling around the party – from Najib's RM2.6 billion donation to 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB), and the ousting of prominent leaders – Puyok said it was still possible for Umno to win over the young voters.

“Yes, they can still do it provided they have the political will. Umno must address the general perception that it is an old party bereft of progressive ideas and leaders.”

He said Umno could do this as it had extensive branches throughout the country and huge resources.

“Umno should put forward young talents to talk about national policies more frequently.