

Putting political power play in perspective

FORMER DAP strongman Sim Kwang Yang, after trying to negotiate a truce between the two factions in the party, used a Chinese saying — chickens are unable to talk to ducks — to describe why he failed in his efforts

The failure is something that may sadden some DAP members but at least they were aware of the existence of the factions, given the public mudslinging they had been embroiled in.

In essence, the DAP members were not dealing with rumours, conjecture or speculation in so far as factionalism in the party.

If they get all worked up, it is only understandable as the problems in the party are crystal clear.

But it is different with Umno. Leaders said to be having differences deny it.

Yet, everyone down the ranks believe the factions are real and building in momentum as next year's party elections draw nearer.

However, Anwar decided to declare openly in Penang, his home state, that he would ensure all 11 Umno divisions there nominate Dr Mahathir for the party presidency.

If that was not enough, Anwar described himself as a student, and said he could not fight

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's pledge that Penang Umno will nominate Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the party president's post should further reduce speculation of a contest for the top Umno post. However, there are still sceptics who believe there are undercurrents hinting at more political manoeuvring to come, writes SHAMSUL AKMAR. 5/3/93

his teacher, what more challenge someone who is more like a father to him.

Such humility and expression of loyalty should be enough to quash all rumours of Anwar intending to challenge Dr Mahathir for the Umno presidency next year.

Penang Umno Youth chief Dr Rahim Md Ghouse said it should augur well for the country at this stage.

"If talk is rife about an impending battle between the top two leaders, it can become a source of political instability.

"We cannot afford this. If we can quash such talk then we can claim we have political stability," he said.

Anwar's pledge is, however, not something new.

He had repeatedly made such pledges of loyalty ever since he assumed the Umno deputy presidency in 1993.

But an Umno leader who was present during the function in Penang when Anwar made the pledge said it was different this time.

"Declaring it openly and lik-

ening Dr Mahathir to his teacher and a father provide a moral binding to the pledge.

"Though anything is possible in politics, I would want to believe the pledge is for real," he

A sceptical Umno member, however, said one should not forget the pledge Anwar made in 1992 about not challenging Tun Ghafar Baba.

"After making the pledge, Anwar did not stop strengthening his position and even before the 1993 party election was held, he had already managed to oust Ghafar from the deputy president's post.

"What is stopping Anwar from doing a *volte-face* this time?" the sceptic asked.

To this, the Umno leader said that the scenario was different.

"Dr Mahathir has proven that he is in control. Any attempt by Anwar to push him out of office will only result in a reverse situation.

"As such, even if we want to question the altruism in Anwar's pledge, the situation will

not allow him to 'do a Ghafar' on Dr Mahathir," he added.

Umno supreme council member Datuk Ibrahim Ali had a different view about things.

"Since Anwar has already made a commitment to support Dr Mahathir's leadership, members should ensure that Anwar keeps his pledge."

Dr Rahim looks at the pledge as Anwar trying to assure Dr Mahathir that he had no intention of challenging him.

"Both need the assurance. The number one needs to be assured that he will not be challenged, the number two also needs the assurance that he gets the number one's backing to remain as number two. That's called reciprocity."

Dr Rahim, who is also the Umno Youth chief of the Permatang Pauh division where Anwar is the chairman, said those who churned out rumours about Anwar taking on Dr Mahathir had underestimated the two leaders.

"They are both world-class politicians.

"Surely, their level of think-

ing is not the same as that of some divisional or branch leader who find some thrill if there is a fight at the top," he added.

But back to reality. It is clear that all this talk about Anwar taking on Dr Mahathir. Anwar resigning and so forth have diminished the credibility of claims of the existence of political stability in the country.

"It is due to this that the masses are so easily made to believe rumours like the recent one about riots in Chow Kit.

"All these spawned from the people's sense of insecurity and I believe it is due to their perception there is no real unity in the top leadership," an Umno leader from Johor said.

In effect, if Anwar's pledge could quash rumours of any impending confrontation between him and Dr Mahathir next year, half the battle against the forces suppressing the country would be won.

Yet, why is it so difficult for the masses to believe there is no rift between the two?

As it is, the two leaders do not speak in 'different tongues like the factions in the DAP which Sim tried to reconcile.

It seems more like the ghost of 1993 which keeps whispering about Anwar reneging on his pledge not to take on Ghafar. This spectre needs to be exorcised.