

Race for posts clouds issues in Keadilan

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By V. Gayathry

PETALING JAYA, Sun: Parti Keadilan Nasional's third annual general assembly presents a good opportunity for the top echelon to make a firm stand on several issues confronting the party.

However, the race for party posts is diminishing such expectations and the talk in the coffeshops after the three-day assembly could very well be that personalities and factions won, instead of the real issues.

"This is a good opportunity to define its stand on the Islamic state issue, its position in the opposition coalition and the pullout of DAP," said political observer Charles Santiago.

"It is no longer sufficient for Keadilan to say that it rejects PAS's Islamic state and DAP's Malaysian Malaysia ideals. What is its stand?"

"Keadilan has yet to give a definitive response on the Islamic state issue, which severed ties between PAS and DAP, as well as the rights of

non-Malays in view of the prime minister's declaration that Malaysia is an Islamic state.

"However, the power struggle between the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (Abim) faction and non-Abim ones will take centre-stage."

The assembly, Santiago said, should also include the merger with Parti Rakyat Malaysia on its agenda and not delay the mandate to amend the constitution to accommodate the changes.

He argued that democracy is not just about elections as debates and expressions of views are fundamental to the development of party politics.

As such, the party can come out more united after the election, Santiago said, but that optimism will rely on whether the approach of the leaders is to find a strategy for Keadilan, emphasise its ideology or focus on individual egos.

"The lobby for support began a long time ago and the number of candidates clearly points to the power struggle."

On claims of "Abimisation" of Keadilan, Santiago argues

that while the Abim faction might have enough clout, it may not get the numbers in terms of votes and seats.

"What is important is the portfolios they will control. For instance, the deputy president's post is open for challenge and the person who wins will head the management committee in charge of discipline and administration. That is an important post."

Six candidates have been nominated for the deputy president's post, including incumbent Dr Chandra Muzaffar who is not seeking re-election.

Many say the fight will be between former Abim president Muhammad Nur Manuty and Johor Keadilan liaison chief Abdul Rahman Othman, but neither has the political experience to take up the position.

The others are Mohamad Ezam Mohd Noor, Saifuddin Nasution and Azmin Ali.

At a news conference two days ago, president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail denied claims of an impending split, saying that it was a ploy to undermine the party

and scare off non-Muslims.

More than 200 candidates were nominated for positions in the supreme council and observers say the list reflects a tussle between the Abim and non-Abim factions.

A poll by *malaysiakini.com* has 22 respondents saying that Keadilan is Abim-influenced, 354 who say the party is a political vehicle for Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and 123 who think it is a multiracial party.

On the resolutions to be tabled, secretary-general Mohd Annuar Tahir said the issues will depend on the content of the presidential address, scheduled for Saturday.

He said the resolutions committee is still receiving input from the divisions and it will be finalised early next week.

The assembly will be open to the media only during the opening address by the president and the heads of the wanita and youth wings on Friday.

A party official said since it is still a young party, there will be a lot of issues and debates from the delegates that should not be publicised.