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### Three-year-old Keadilan facing leadership crisis

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Parti Keadilan Nasional is just three years old and is already facing a leadership crisis.

A double blow is the growing internal factionalism which party leaders fear will be crippling if left unchecked.

Already, two top leaders have announced that they will not seek re-election in the party elections next month while its Youth vice-chief Hamdan Taha has resigned.

Keadilan deputy president Dr Chandra Muzaffar is firm in his decision not to offer himself for re-election while its vice president Zainur Zakaria today confirmed a similar decision. All three wish to remain as ordinary members.

A former party leader said that Keadilan has "no real leader" who is strong enough to lead a party that is virtually without financial backing.

Besides that, the power struggle in the party has always been, from the start, predominantly between Abim (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia) and JIM (Jemaah Islah Malaysia) members.

But she added that the party was taking all this in its stride and was confident that leaders would set aside personal differences in the interest of the party and country.

A top leader said that the current situation in Keadilan was "deeper and more than meets the eye".

He said that a solution to the party's leadership crisis could be resolved if the leaders would "sit down and talk about it".

"You need to reflect ... to probe ... do some soul-searching," he said.

There are leaders within Keadilan who have faith that the existing factionalism and intense fighting for posts among aspirants will only strengthen the party.

Although some feel that the fight for support is brewing trouble ahead of the party elections next month and have called for the supreme council's intervention, there are those who think this is healthy for the party.

Observers say that development in the wake of the elections next month is a process of "re-adjusting the whole organisation", with the sole aim of strengthening it.

The development is normal in any political party, they say, brushing aside allegations of signs of trouble and likening the situation as "just a storm in a tea-cup".

Keadilan Information chief Ruslan Kassim, a former Umno leader, said allegations that there were efforts by members aligned to certain non-governmental groups in the party to take control of the party and oust former Umno members were untrue.

"Many former Umno leaders who are holding posts in the party do not think so. It all started when nominations by divisions co-incidentally comprise those linked to a certain NGO.

"Anyway, the present office bearers are not chosen by members and this will be the first time members are given the opportunity to elect their leaders. We all should leave it to the grassroots to decide and not start throwing allegations," he added.

Supreme council member Saifuddin Nasution Ismail said although there seemed to be intense fighting for posts, competition would be healthy and under control.

"Contests for posts are common in any organisation and in Malaysian political history, the only incident where a political party is destroyed was when Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah challenged Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the Umno president's post in 1987.

"We have seen intense fighting for posts in MCA then and even now but the party remains strong. I do not see Keadilan, despite its young age, destroyed merely because members fight for posts."

Party Youth secretary Zahid Md Arif believe members are offering themselves for posts to contribute for the betterment of the party. This shows that they have confidence in the party.

But he said the party supreme council should not brush aside claims by Hamdan that there were efforts to sideline former Umno members, some of whom are Keadilan founder members and holding senior party posts.

"I personally do not rule out some truth to Hamdan's claims. These should be addressed by the party immediately before things get out of hand," he added.

Hamdan claimed there were efforts by party members who are members of Abim JIM to take control of the party.

He called on the supreme council to seriously look into the recent development in the party before things get out of control and destroy the party.

"Intense fights for posts are okay in a party as old as Umno or Pas, but Keadilan is still at its infancy stage and only having its first elections.

"To serve the party, one need not have to hold posts. I for example am willing to relinquish my post and serve as an ordinary member.

"It is not posts that should matter but the commitment to sacrifice time and efforts to campaign and fight for party struggles which should be the priority," he added.

(END)