

**Pakatan convention: Accord or discord?**  
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The Pakatan Rakyat national convention in Penang on Sunday will be keenly watched for clues on how the opposition grouping will prepare for the next general election.

About 2,000 delegates from Parti Keadilan Rakyat, PAS and DAP will gather at the Millennium Hall in Kepala Batas to show that they are still in accord.

And they will hear their leaders set the tone for electoral battle amid reports of declining support.

The by-election to be held following the death of Barisan Nasional state assemblyman for Tenang Datuk Sulaiman Taha early today is certain to be discussed.

On the surface, it looks tough for PR to maintain the level of support generated in the 2008 general election, especially with the problems besetting "paramount leader" Anwar Ibrahim.

Anwar is facing sodomy charges and struggling to contain the damage from Wikileaks, and is under six months suspension from Parliament.

In fact, PR had been on a retreat mode in 2010, losing to Barisan Nasional all but one of the four by-elections held this year.

Slip in opinion polls

DAP central executive committee member and Jelutong MP Jeff Ooi admitted that losing the by-elections was "a setback to our momentum in capturing people's confidence."

"This was further dampened by the negative situation Anwar is facing," he said.

He added that PR had to take serious note of the multiple opinion polls showing that perception of Barisan Nasional had gradually improved while the opposition was losing support.

The latest poll, by Universiti Malaya, found that 43 per cent of residents in several purported PKR strongholds in the Klang Valley would not vote for the party at the next general election.

The poll also suggested that the PKR crisis had affected the residents' confidence in the party and Anwar.

PR leaders themselves believed that they would have to work hard to retain the four opposition-controlled states - Selangor, Penang, Kedah and Kelantan - in the next general election.

DAP veteran leader Lim Kit Siang warned at the Selangor DAP convention last month that PR could lose the state if the coalition was not united.

Pakatan could lose S'gor

According to one projection, Pakatan Rakyat will win only 18 of 56 state seats in Selangor if the state election is held next year.

The DAP is forecast to retain the 14 seats it captured in 2008, PKR to lose 14 and win four, and PAS to be defeated in all its six constituencies.

NONEOoi said the one-day convention would likely discuss the impact of the suspension of Anwar from Parliament over the Apco issue, and of R Sivarasa (Subang), Azmin Ali (Gombak) and Karpal Singh (Bukit Gelugor) for contempt.

He added that some believe that the suspension will boost support for the opposition.

PAS central Committee member Khalid Samad said that PR must convince the people that it was a workable coalition, and that "although we have differences, they do not dither us."

He professed to be unconcerned about any revelations by Wikileaks related to Anwar.

"I think people understand what Wikileaks is all about, just a bundle of communication leaks which are not credible, which appear more like gossip than facts," he said.

While most of the leaders agreed that infighting among the coalition partners had affected the popularity of the opposition, they believed that the suspension of Anwar would help their standing among the people.

Details on CPF

And the suspension, they said, would not affect the running of PKR or PR.

"For the past one year, we have put in some mechanism to strengthen Pakatan as PR is not about individuals. The suspension of Anwar will not affect our decision-making process," said PKR strategy director Tian Chua.

Although some states seemed to be slow in implementing the common policy adopted at the first PR convention in Shah Alam in December 2009, most of it had been implemented, Tian Chua said.

PKR secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution said the details of the common policy framework will be revealed at the convention, especially what PR would do within 100 days if they won the next general election.

"Anthony Loke (DAP), Nasaruddin Mat Isa (PAS) and myself will present the details although the common policy framework is very broad," he said.

Third force

PR also faces challenges posed by former members such as Zaid Ibrahim, who left PKR and is now the president of Parti Kesejahteraan Insan Tanah Air, or Kita.

Then there is the Malaysian Civil Liberties Movement set up in October this year by a group of Malaysians based in London.

The group is said to be planning to field "more professional and ethical" candidates in the next general election, and it is likely to concentrate on the Klang valley.

The movement has named a prominent human rights lawyer, Malik Imtiaz Sarwar, as its first candidate for the next general election.

PR leaders believe the group lacks support among locals but, as Ooi notes, "are still looking at them cautiously."

- Bernama

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