

PKR prepares the ground in tipping Rafizi for Pandan

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COMMENT The disclosure - said to be inadvertent - that PKR strategic director Rafizi Ramli is certain to be its candidate for the parliamentary seat of Pandan in Kuala Lumpur has had supporters hoping that as Pandan goes, so will the rest of the party.

This is so because, in happy contrast with the prelude to the last general election, there is now in PKR no dearth of candidates vying for selection.

Before the last general election in March 2008, party adviser Anwar Ibrahim had virtually to go around begging supporters to contest.

The hammering the opposition took at the 2004 general election at the hands of Umno-BN, under the 'new broom' leadership of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, had a shriveling effect on the pool of available candidates for PKR.

Sympathisers and supporters the party had aplenty. However, from among this crowd those willing to place their fealty on the line were but a few.

The tsunami of support for the opposition at the 2008 polls has changed all that, particularly for PKR, the newest of the opposition triad whose other components are PAS and DAP.

These days PKR is rife with choice, a situation which cannot exactly be described as an embarrassment of riches but things are pretty close to that.

This situation has its downside: in some seats there are as many as four aspirants pushing their claims. In at least one constituency there are two 'bilik gerakan' (operations centre) up and running, one for each probable.

For a party not exactly brimming with manpower and money, this is a dispersion of resources that could be better focused on fighting a ruling coalition not short of finances and its concomitant advantage - abundant hands on deck.

Betrayal within PKR ranks

Besides, these days better-informed voters want to know who is it they are asked to endorse so that a suitably prior announcement of the candidate allows for keener voter appraisal of his or her merits.

This is of course the ideal situation but for PKR, which is still a work in progress, things are not yet on an even keel; too early a ventilation of candidates could excite competitive spite and invite sabotage.

Anwar Ibrahim, who has had to endure several betrayals by one-time loyalists, would be cautious about what he would view as premature ventilation of the candidates' list.

Some of PKR's incumbent legislators are going to be dropped for reason of their poor performance and general unsuitability as politicians.

Some others who have served the party for virtually all the 13 years of its existence and who think that they merit selection will see their claims for selection ignored.

A few will find that because they have not endeared themselves to any faction within the party, they have fallen through the interstices of the selection process.

In other words, the vagaries of the selection process will yield the usual crop of deserving winners, whining losers and hapless victims. That's par for the course.

However, because PKR, among the opposition parties, suffered the most number of defections from the ranks of its elected legislators at the 2008 general election, the party has a brittle image in the eyes of the public.

Five of the 31 PKR MPs - Zahrain Mohd Hashim (Bayan Baru), Tan Tee Beng (Nibong Tebal), N Gobalakrishnan (Padang Serai), Zulkifli Nordin (Kulim-Bandar Baru) and Wee Choo Keong (Wangsa Maju) - elected in 2008 crossed over to the independent benches, causing the public to think that the party is stocked with potential quislings.

This image is not helped by the intensity of the broadsides hurled from time to time at PKR by former Anwar protégés like Ezam Mohd Noor and Anuar Shaari, who are in ardent cahoots with Umno in the campaign to undermine public confidence in PKR.

Add to that the arrival (in 2009) and abrupt departure (in late 2010) of Zaid Ibrahim and one gets to appreciate the brittleness of the PKR image in the general public mind.

Surendran for Padang Serai?

Of the opposition triad of PKR, PAS and DAP, the party that Umno would most like to do in is PKR because it is, though Malay-dominated, still significantly multiracial.

That is a threat to Umno that is more lethal than the dangers posed to Umno's hold on power by the exclusively Muslim PAS and the preponderantly Chinese DAP.

The inadvertent revelation that Rafizi is being tapped for the Pandan seat is being hailed as an antidote to the image that the defections from PKR over the years have saddled it with.

Rafizi is the just about the brightest star in the constellation of young talent that PKR possesses.

His work in exposing the scam overt the cattle-breeding project has won him his spurs in the

national political pantheon.

The news that he is to be the PKR candidate for Pandan, if followed by disclosures such as N Surendran's (left) candidature for Padang Serai and Sim Tze Tzin's for Bayan Baru, would go a solid distance in showing the depth of ability available to the party and multiracial composition of its candidate list.

The entire PKR list need not be ventilated but progressive announcements of some candidates would underscore the point about the party's confidence in its choices and the solidity of its young corps of leaders.

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