

Azmin for PKR No. 1 for certain, even without goading

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COMMENT Even without the prodding of Utusan Malaysia's columnist Awang Selamat, it is certain that PKR deputy president Azmin Ali would go for the president's post at the party elections expected to be held in April-May next year.

This is because incumbent president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail is barred by the PKR constitution from going for what would be a fourth term.

PKR elected to have term limits written into the party's constitution to prevent a case of the top leader overstaying his/her welcome.

It is a reflection of Awang Selamat's interest in stirring factional strife in PKR that has led the paper's editors, who employ the pen name when holding forth on political affairs in the Umno-owned paper's Op-Ed pages, to back Azmin for the top post.

Their backing does not stem from any predilection for the man; only from a desire to foment factional strife in PKR and thereby undermine an adversary that, although it did not exceed its 2008 MP tally at the 13th general election, yet came within one seat of matching its remarkable collection of 31 seats at GE12.

The current PKR No. 2 does not need the goading of Awang Selamat to go for the top post when incumbent Wan Azizah relinquishes it.

NONEAzmin, deputy president since the last election in 2010 after Dr Syed Husin Ali (right) retired from the No. 2 post, will be keen to prop up his position in the party by taking the top post, unless of course party adviser Anwar Ibrahim decides that it is time he assumes the post.

Party elders and stalwarts have advised Anwar to place his name as candidate for the post now that Azizah will have to vacate when her current term expires at the upcoming party election.

But Anwar is keeping his counsel and has declined to say one way or other what he would do, which leaves the way open for Azmin to vie for the post.

NONEIf Anwar does not contest the top post, about the only person who could rival Azmin for the role would be Selangor Menteri Besar Abdul Khalid Ibrahim (left).

But being busy with the manifold responsibilities of being MB of the richest state in the country would preclude the requisite attention to party affairs the president of a still fledgling party would have to pay.

Although Khalid is popular enough in the party to mount a credible challenge for the No. 1 post, he would have to be a bigamist - married to two jobs - to bring off the MB-ship of Selangor and the PKR presidency in one fell swoop.

It is improbable that he could bring it off and that would leave Azmin's road to the presidency pretty much open though party insiders say there will be someone else's hat in the ring for the No. 1 post and that Azmin will not be the sole contestant.

Party remains intact

Who this would be would be difficult to say at this stage but the appearance of "Azmin for president! We don't need a 'sleeping beauty' " posters have only crass mischief for its motive because Azizah is already constitutionally barred from contesting.

NONEIt's anybody's guess who the purveyors of these posters are but they cannot have much interest in PKR affairs if they do not already know that Azizah is ineligible for a fourth term.

This would make almost certain that the purveyors are external elements intent on depicting PKR as a house of cards ready to fall into disarray once serious factional battles break out.

PKR has survived ideological battles, such as the one the occurred over Parti Keadilan Nasional's merger with Parti Rakyat Malaysia, and factional battles, such as the contest between Azmin and Zaid Ibrahim for the No. 2 post in 2010, and also the wrangle for the Selangor MB's post earlier this year between Khalid and Azmin.

The party has remained intact, nay even grown, after these bouts of internecine strife.

There are something like 600,000 members on the party register, more than DAP's 200,000-plus, much fewer than PAS' 1 million strong outfit, and well behind Umno's 3 million-plus contingent.

Fourteen years on from its formation, it is a party on an upward trajectory of

growth and popularity, with the second tier of its leadership sporting a youthful vibrancy that can augurs well for the future.

Facing up to and re-gathering after periodic and inevitable bouts of factional strife are going to be milestones in the party's metamorphosis from fledgling to matured political entity.

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