

Is PKR 2014 becoming PAS 2009?
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COMMENT I have written on a number of occasions about how while voters choose a ruling party, it is essentially political party members that choose the head of state, because by convention, the leader of the winning party becomes the premier.

This is but one reason why the PKR race for deputy president could potentially have long-term repercussions for the millions of Malaysians who are not party members. While the race for some of the other posts are of some interest, they mostly seem to be proxy battles along the same battle lines.

The choice seems to be between feudalism and business as usual on the one hand, versus a breath of fresh air on the other.

In terms of players and camps, it seems we are facing three main camps - the Anwar Ibrahim gang, the Azmin Ali gang, and Khalid Ibrahim. How much of a gang the latter has is not fully clear.

Some may consider Azmin (right) an Anwarista, but it is now clear that whatever he was in a past, Azmin is now an Azminista.

It appears that over the last few years, Azmin has come to see Anwar as a stumbling block who is perpetually frustrating the former's ambitions. His refusal to back Azmin openly for the post of Selangor menteri besar is probably the latest in such cases.

The Kajang move clearly showed that between Azmin and Khalid for menteri besar, Anwar chose Anwar.

Anwar didn't stop there. When it became clear that Azmin was considering running for PKR president, Anwar had himself nominated to scare Azmin away - a tactic that worked, and which quite obviously served no other purpose whatsoever.

Kitchen cabinets

For deputy president, Anwar faced the Khalid or Azmin question again, and answered in a similar fashion. He put forth Saifuddin Nasution, a perfectly nice and affable man who has never before displayed such open political ambition, and who established a reputation instead for quite efficiently doing whatever Anwar wanted done.

Saifuddin quickly established an electoral pact with two other Anwar loyalists, Nurul Izzah Anwar, and Rafizi Ramli, the famed architect of the wonderfully effective Kajang Move. A

kitchen cabinet trinity, from the looks of it.

A vote for Saifuddin seems to be a vote for running PKR the same way Anwar has always run it - 'outer circle need not apply' personality-based politics, with little regard for transparency, and sustainable institutional strength.

A vote for Azmin seems to be a vote for feudalism as well, albeit probably a brand that is steeped even deeper in money politics. It was truly disheartening to see Azmin loyalists with zero ability or tangible achievements (including some of the most non-performing elected representatives ever) float odiously near to the top of the vice-president and central committee voting results.

In either of these cases, apart from a few differences and cosmetic changes, Umno-style feudalism seems alive and well.

It's rather harder to say what Khalid (left) intends to do. I've heard that there's a focus on setting up cooperatives for the party youth, and better management of the party finances, but I've not personally seen a manifesto or anything similar.

As usual, in terms of traditional partisan politics and political communication, Khalid's rivals appear to have travelled further. I can only imagine that at the heart of it, Khalid wants the party to be run in a manner similar to the way Selangor is run - watertight, above board efficiency, and zero tolerance for corruption.

Three-corner spoilers

It seems clear that the deputy president race for PKR in 2014 could well be headed the same way as the deputy president race for PAS in 2009. That year, incumbent Nasharuddin Mat Isa garnered 480 votes against Husam Musa's 281 and Mat Sabu's 261.

These numbers are very similar to the voting results from the first leg of PKR elections held last weekend, with the total votes for Khalid (2,228) and Saifuddin (2,322) combined amounting to a similar amount as Azmin's (5,111).

One challenger would have an excellent fighting chance against Azmin, two make it almost impossible.

If Anwar sent Saifuddin (right) to contest (long after Khalid announced his intention to vie for the post) despite being aware of this fact, then that can only mean that when push came to shove, he still preferred Azmin over Khalid - demonstrating the same type of character judgment that has brought him to exactly where he is today.

If this trend continues and Azmin wins, I suppose Anwar will have given PKR the party it deserves. Things will be done the same way they've always been done, resulting in Pakatan Rakyat being just as far away from Putrajaya as they were in the last elections.

Many of us will not have an opportunity to vote in these party elections, and as a result, may lose the opportunity to help some truly honest politicians rise to the top. This unfortunate situation should make us rethink our political system, and our place in it.

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