

PKR fighting its own demons

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PKR CONGRESS Probably for the first time in a PKR congress, the discussion was not about policies or about bashing the BN federal government as they have done so often in the past.

The three-day congress that concluded yesterday, if anything, reflects the tumultuous eight months that the party had gone through, pretty much since the onset of 2014.

Most of the discussions, be it from their senior leaders to their delegates, reflected the simmering tension within the party, probably encapsulated by de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim's 40-minute speech in closing the congress, where he seemed to issue reprimand after reprimand to the party members.

"We give plenty of space in this party for the young people to grow. Please don't misuse that platform.

"Many people have criticised me and said that I am being too lenient when it comes to discipline in this party," Anwar said.

He was not the only one who spoke about discipline. This time, the salvos, albeit subtle, were directed internally, without specifying names.

For PKR at least this round, the demon is not external, but internal.

Messy Kajang Move, party polls

Early this year, a select group of party leaders initiated the 'Kajang move' in a bid to replace Selangor Menteri Besar Abdul Khalid Ibrahim. The idea was to install Anwar as the next MB by having him contest the Kajang state seat.

But the move fell through due to Anwar's conviction for sodomy at the Court of Appeal, which some accuse of having been rushed to foil the move.

His wife, party president, Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, contested the seat and became an elected representative for the first time since 2008, but the efforts to replace Khalid were placed on a back burner.

A couple of months ago, amidst a year-long running tension with Khalid's administration, PKR leaders reignited the plan to replace Khalid with Wan Azizah. The move has been far from smooth - it took them almost a month to get other Pakatan Rakyat component parties to agree to the proposal.

In between, PKR faced what is arguably its most messy party elections- fraught with allegations of vote buying and misconduct. The party had to issue a slew of show cause letters and suspension orders as members broke ranks and criticised one another, airing their frustrations via the mainstream media.

By the time the results were announced last week, there was hardly a ripple of joy as the MB crisis had put the party in a precarious position.

Vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar (left) in her closing speech admitted that the party is at a “crossroads”, and none of the other top leaders were disputing her assessment of the party’s situation.

Anwar fired salvos at party leaders whom failed to replicate their zeal in campaigning for party posts when it comes to the general election, and also admitted the entire leadership must take the blame for the way the elections were conducted.

Above all, from all the speeches of its top leaders, it has become apparent that there are cracks in the party leadership that went beyond the customary “differences of opinion”.

Anwar tries to douse flames

While party strategists such as Rafizi Ramli and Saifuddin Nasution had dug their heels on Abdul Khalid following his refusal to resign, Anwar today called for restraint in criticisms levelled at the sacked PKR member.

While some of his party leaders have positioned the party struggle to be directly related to Anwar’s fate as he awaits the sodomy appeal, Anwar (left) himself seemed to disassociate himself from such statements, saying that the party must be above him.

While some central leaders have taken liberties in pressuring, and even criticising PAS following the Islamic party dragging its feet to approve PKR’s move to replace Abdul Khalid, Anwar was calling on his members not to run down PAS and stressed that they are still important to the Pakatan cause.

The mixed signals were not coming from the delegates, but were coming from party top leaders itself. Newly elected vice president Rafizi Ramli was also looking at the demons within, constantly stressing that the worst criticisms directed at the party leadership had come from within the party.

The issue of PKR’s relationship with PAS is also simmering on the surface. With delegates and some top leaders already unhappy with PAS’ conduct in the MB crisis, the congress coincided with some sections of PAS making demands for the Pengkalan Kubor state seat in Kelantan, which has been vacated due to the passing of its former assemblyperson from Umno.

There were also complaints of PAS “bullying” PKR in states such as Terengganu and

Kelantan, where PAS' influence is strong.

With these internal party matters and inter-Pakatan issues dominating the congress, there was very little space left for PKR to talk about the federal government or the ruling coalition.

"We are being distracted from our true cause," Wan Azizah said in her final address, and aptly so.

Nurul Izzah likewise in hers asked delegates to decide "whether you want to progress in getting the mandate to run the country, or remain as opposition. The decision is in your hands".

While the congress had been touted as something that could finally close ranks between members after tumultuous party elections, the verdict is still out, especially with the MB crisis being far from over.

At the moment however, judging by the congress, PKR is still mired in its "distraction" and might not arise from it anytime soon.

For the party, they now seem to be fighting their own demons, a battle that has already consumed three-quarters of a calendar year and still counting.

Selangor crisis today

1.33pm: Selangor PAS reps still do not want to sign statutory declarations declaring support for Wan Azizah.

10.22am: Khalid says he will have an audience with the sultan tomorrow

10.28am: Khalid denies graft allegations involving his out-of-court settlement with Bank Islam, but does not reveal details citing banking laws

10.53am: Khalid says the PKR-criticised water industry restructuring deal will be his legacy

12.22pm: PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim says the sultan is likely to grant an audience to Wan Azizah after he meets Khalid

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