

## **'I will still have say, even from prison'**

**MalaysiaKini.com**

**Oct 27, 2014**

INTERVIEW Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim does not seem intent on handing over the reins of the coalition over to anybody, even if it means he will be guiding Pakatan Rakyat from behind bars.

"I am still around, even if I am imprisoned, I am still there," said Anwar, when asked what kind of a post-Anwar opposition he envisions if he is jailed.

Anwar was speaking to Malaysiakini in a marathon series of interviews he has been giving to foreign and local media, three days before his appeal tomorrow.

The PKR de facto leader and Permatang Pauh Member of Parliament is facing the possibility of being jailed for the second time for five years or more on a second sodomy charge. Upon release, he is not allowed to be politically active for another five years.

"I would disagree (on a post-Anwar phase) because Anwar is still there, whether in the chair or in prison. Secondly, there is a mechanism in place now for the leadership.

"In the second layer, for example the secretary-general meetings, the deputies' or election directors' meetings - they actually wield a lot of influence. The manifesto, the shadow budget - a lot has happened because we rely quite a lot on the younger set of leaders.

"But if you say that there's no Anwar, then they will take turns. If the meeting is at PKR HQ, Wan Azizah chairs - I hope it's not the issue of women in charge again because she used to chair (the meetings).

"If it is held at PAS HQ, then Hadi will chair, if at DAP, then Lim Guan Eng (right) or Lim Kit Siang will chair. So, there is not a problem," said Anwar, taking a dig at his fellow PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang in between.

Anwar and Hadi had been alleged to be on not so cordial terms, after Hadi, during the recent Selangor Menteri Besar saga, had opposed PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail from taking the post, reportedly because of her gender.

'One of the worst periods'

On PKR itself, Anwar admitted that there were divisions within the party and when they became obvious during the MB saga, he had indeed worried about it.

"I'm not playing down the issues - I was quite worried during the party elections and the MB issue. But to me, it's more about the principle - the sultan (Selangor) trying to interfere,

asking to be given more than one name.

"It was one of the most worst periods in my life. People say I wanted Wan Azizah (as MB) but no, it could be Azmin or Azizah (right) but I refuse to concede (to give more than one name)."

Yet, he insisted that the divisions came about mainly during the dramatic party polls, which he blamed as "not a good system".

"The mistake was that the electoral period was too long, it was a major blunder that we adopted the system.

"It is the system. In one constituency, one had to travel four hours to vote. It sounds like a good system - one person one vote - but its effectiveness is questionable.

"These people discount the fact that the so-called divisions were on the issue of the elections. But in free and fair elections, we can vote.

"And of course some people want me to stop some candidates. As you know, I disagreed. And it's good also to give a clear signal. Unless you are inclusive, you'll continue to have divisions.

"Some (BN) ministers were surprised at how we were able to consolidate that fast after what seemed to be fractious exchanges between the groups and following the MB controversy.

"But give credit to the leaders, after that (the MB having been appointed), finally they say it's over and moved on. And the MB (Azmin Ali) has moved beyond that. Everybody rallied together. This is normal."

Hopes of being PM

Asked if he still harbours hopes of becoming the prime minister, should Pakatan win in the next general election, despite the fact he will be past 70 if he is jailed for sodomy this time around, Anwar retorts: "Why not? Is there a problem?"

"Seriously, you come to a stage when it is not an obsession. People will of course criticise me - what else would Umno say?"

"Do you think (Prime Minister) Najib Abdul Razak (left) is a better PM? I don't think so. Or to quote George Bernard Shaw, 'who are we against the millions?'" philosophises Anwar.

On a more serious note, Anwar says being the PM is secondary to other issues on the Pakatan agenda now.

"Reform, economics, race relations, education, multiculturalism - is it just for Anwar to

become PM or is it for the programmes?

“The coming years will see whether Anwar is relevant or not - time will tell,” said Anwar.

He said he prefers to be pessimistic, but joked that he fears his wife, Wan Azizah, would refuse to vacate the seat for him if and when the time comes.

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