

**Best of both worlds for Saifuddin**  
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**Beh Lih Yi**

Newly-minted PKR strategic director Saifuddin Nasution Ismail has said there is no conflict of interest because of his new position and membership in another opposition party, PAS.

Saifuddin told malaysiakini that the offer of the newly-created post was made to him by PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim at a meeting in Kuala Lumpur a week before the PKR congress, held last weekend.

"My consideration in taking up the offer is beyond partisanship and personality (Anwar). It is in the interest of the whole struggle," the ex-Lunas state assemblyperson said when contacted today.

"He (Anwar) needs someone who can help not only PKR as a party but BA (Barisan Alternatif) as a whole since the general election is around the corner, so this (offer) is done in the context of BA."

Saifuddin, 42, who won the bitterly-fought Lunas by-election in 2000 after defeating a MIC candidate, had held the post of Keadilan vice-president before the party merged with PRM in 2003 to become PKR.

Although seen as a popular figure in the party, his profile has dropped since the 2004 general election. He opted not to defend his vice-presidency in the inaugural PKR poll the same year after differences arose with certain leaders.

Since then, he has moved his base to Kota Bharu and works for the PAS-led Kelantan government under a training and community project.

He was in the media limelight again when he campaigned actively for PKR during the Ijok by-election last month, but he went public recently with the news that he had joined PAS' Pokok Sena division in Kedah early this year.

"But I have yet to receive a PAS membership certificate," he said when quizzed on the status of his membership.

"We shouldn't look at it from this angle - when I first joined the (Kelantan) state government two years ago, I was still a PKR member and the menteri besar's office had no problem with it. This is the dynamic that we have."

It is said that Saifuddin's appointment to the prominent position in PKR has ruffled feathers among some PAS leaders. Nevertheless, communication and consensus was said to have reached between the two party top leaders over his new role.

Malaysiakini also understand that Saifuddin was initially offered the PKR secretary-general's post.

Asked about this, the staunch reformasi activist responded: "I felt honoured when it was first mention to me but I think it should be left to others who are within the rank and file. I prefer the current role and I am more comfortable with it."

## **Countering Azmin's influence?**

Saifuddin's comeback in PKR, which has been described as a "pleasant surprise" by some, was announced by Anwar last Sunday at the end of the party congress. It was greeted with cheers and applause by the delegates.

With his new position, he will also sit in the influential political bureau to be chaired by Anwar and which comprises top leaders.

PKR insiders widely see Saifuddin's appointment as an effort to counter the strong influence of vice-president Azmin Ali and to pacify the unhappiness among supporters of ex-Youth chief Ezam Mohd Nor.

The two former long-time aides of Anwar had fallen out in the run-up to the party elections and Ezam subsequently relinquished all posts in February.

Saifuddin disagreed that his appointment was to please Ezam's followers in the party.

"I don't think so. There was discussion about Ezam's role and Anwar made it clear I should maintain communication with Ezam. He (Anwar) welcomes Ezam if he changes his mind but I am not replacing Ezam in the party."

He was also optimistic that his position would not elicit unhappiness among other party leaders.

A Youth leader known to be aligned to Azmin said: "This is an attempt to balance the influence from Azmin but I think it is a right decision by the party because it will gather every faction together to face the next general election."

## **Election strategy**

Asked about his immediate tasks, Saifuddin said it will include working towards a formidable opposition electoral pact in facing the next general election. This will cover seat negotiations, preparation of an election manifesto and a functional election machinery.

Asked whether this would overlap the roles of the election bureau currently chaired by Azmin, Saifuddin said they would complement one another.

"I have been made understand that I will focus more on the strategy while (the election bureau) will focus on preparing the list of parliamentary and state seats (to contest), analysing the party's strength and weakness, and identifying the candidates," he said.

"My role will be more macro and the bureau will focus on micro aspects."

As for his personal plans to contest the general election, Saifuddin said: "I leave it to the party, (PAS or PKR) I'll keep my options open, (so long as it does not mean) contesting on a Barisan Nasional ticket."