

Azmin, Zaid frontrunners for PKR No 2
Malaysiakini.com
September 3, 2010

PKR supreme council member Zaid Ibrahim's announcement that he will contest in the upcoming party polls - the first direct election with voting being carried out over four weeks in October and November - has brought about intense speculation over who will vie for the coveted deputy post.

The post, currently held by Syed Husin Ali, is up for grabs should the incumbent announce his intention to step down in the coming weeks.

The veteran politician, who has held the post for two terms, is likely to quit following family pressure and health concerns.

While Zaid (left) did not specify which post he is contesting, he is a prominent figure in the list of four said to have the deputy post in their sights.

The others include fellow supreme council member and vice-president Mustapha Kamil Ayub, Selangor MB Khalid Ibrahim and vice-president Azmin Ali.

But according to a former political bureau member who request anonymity to adhere to party discipline, it is likely to be a straight fight between Zaid and Azmin (right).

Having come under so much criticism from PKR lately, Khalid's political support is questionable.

He also admits to be less interested in politics, preferring instead to focus his attention on running the state.

Mustapha, on the other hand, is a "non-starter" who is believed to be "planted" in the ring to discourage others from contesting the same post, the source said.

According to the source, who holds a prominent party post, the vice-president is also too much of an "unknown figure" to have a chance in this battle of giants.

PKR chief Zuraida Kamaruddin agrees: "He (Mustapha) is an old face, but profile-wise, he will lose out to Azmin."

This is despite that both men have been in the party for about the same period of time.

Zaid's loyalty untested

Azmin's lengthy experience in the party puts him head and shoulders over Zaid, whose loyalty some feel is still under question, she said.

"(Zaid) has yet to be tested. No doubt he has made his sacrifices in Umno. But after the defections, the grassroots are very cautious about loyalty.

"The members would want to ensure continuity, they would vote for someone who understands the party struggle," she said.

Zaid, who is also Federal Territories PKR chief, had joined PKR as a 'prized catch' two years ago.

Although saddled with allegations of money politics in Umno, his protest resignation as de facto law minister after the Internal Security Act was used against dissidents, gained him respect and raised his public image.

But as a man of principle, Zaid also appears to be marching to his own tune and is uninterested in keeping up appearances.

Political bureau member S Manickavasagam said for Zaid, a relatively new party member, to go for such a high position could rub some people the wrong way.

"People would think that a new (member) shouldn't suddenly contest for such a high post," he said of Zaid, whom some claim had even considered the top post.

Azmin, he added, is far more recognisable, particularly in Selangor where he was recently appointed state chief - a position which was taken from Khalid following apparent unhappiness in the party.

Support in Selangor is important as the state has the most number of the party's 400,000 members, each of whom will contribute a vote for the aspiring candidates.

Azmin's political ambitions

To some extent, said Zuraida, the said rift between Khalid and Azmin will influence the decision of members.

While the party leadership denies it, the issue has been heavily reported by the media and could influence members who are not privy to leadership meetings, she said.

The changing of the guard in Selangor PKR is reminiscent of allegations that Azmin was involved in internal sabotage, which led to Zaid's defeat in the Hulu Selangor by-election.

Azmin's obvious political ambitions could also hurt his campaign, particularly in Sabah, said the former political bureau member.

The vice-president is alleged to have masterminded the suspension of 12 leaders due to their role in setting up Parti Cinta Sabah last year.

"Sabahans also do not favour him as he played a role in bringing Umno to the state when he was Anwar's aide during his Umno days. He is seen to still act like an Umno man," he said.

On the other hand, Zaid's 'liberal' approach has attracted the attention of the majority non-Malay members of PKR.

"PKR may have Malays at top leadership but more than 60 percent of its members are non-Malays. 20 percent are from Sabah, 15 percent are from Sarawak and there is a sizeable number of Indians," he said.

This 'liberal' image is also not going to put off the Malay members of PKR, he said, of whom half would probably vote to back Zaid in protest against Azmin's 'Umno-demeanour'.

Spanner in the works

While party loyalty is important, said another party insider, Azmin's performance in the past 10-odd years pales in comparison to what Zaid has achieved since he joined.

"Zaid is seen as someone who can put together structures and develop strategies. The fact that he was chosen to put together the Pakatan common policy, and not Azmin, says something," he said.

At the same time, the experienced politician's glowing public image is believed by some to be due to his influence in the media.

NONEWhile he refutes such claims, Zaid is said to be linked to a number of non-mainstream print and online media which have been championing his case against Azmin.

Whatever the case, nothing is certain until Syed Husin's (left in photo) announcement, said the former political bureau member.

"He can put a spanner in the works. He has not, and will not, likely to throw his support behind either Azmin or Zaid," he said.

He added that if the 74-year-old contests and retains his seat, and later decides to resign before his term ends, the supreme council will need to appoint an acting deputy president.

If Azmin is indeed Anwar's blue-eyed boy as claimed by many, there will be no questions over who the new PKR No 2 will be, he said.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.

Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/141809>