

Deputy leader contest: Aspirants need mediation skills
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COMMENT Now that a contest for the deputy presidency of PKR appears inevitable, it would help to look at the requisites for being No 2 in the party.

This column has floated the undemocratic suggestion that a contest for the position is just what the party does not need at this juncture.

Already in what has happened in recent days in its Sabah chapter, one reason for the no-contest school of thought – that it would split the party into factions ahead of a sooner-than-due general election – is confirmed as prescient.

Only party ostriches would deny the negative impact the upcoming contest has already had on PKR's Sabah chapter and, by extension, on its Sarawak wing.

If there is a silver lining to the clouds that overhang Sabah PKR, it is that in the way the problem evolved there lies insight in what the requirements would be to be No 2 in the national line-up.

From the onset of the problems in October last year, arising from a dispute as to who should lead PKR's Sabah chapter, there was no leader in the party's hierarchy with the habit of holding facts in solution and the emotional intelligence to go with it.

PKR's Sabah problems required in an interlocutor someone with this composite ability, the absence of which Britain's former prime minister Tony Blair now faults in his deputy Gordon Brown, who Blair says was analytically astute but empathetically defective.

With PKR supremo Anwar Ibrahim entangled in legal problems and apt every now and then to go abroad to hone his international profile, there was an acute need in the party hierarchy for an interlocutor in Sabah, someone who was analytically acute and empathetically adequate.

Seeing both sides of the conflict

The interlocutor must have an ability to plunge through the miasma of contention to grasp the essentials of the situation and thus demonstrate to the contending factions what their stances implied for PKR's goals at the state and national levels.

What the party had in the place of this hypothetical interlocutor were, essentially, mediators whose neutrality was not taken as given.

Anwar's role was to skirt the boundaries of the contending factions' maximal and minimal positions and try to find a median that would eventuate once the creation of a splinter party appeared the least palatable of the antagonists' options.

That median was arrived at in mid-December, two months after strife broke out. A pact was hammered out, but not much effort was spent in its implementation – again an effect of the absence of an interlocutor with an ability to see both sides of the conflict, empathetically.

The upshot: a revival of the Sabah problems in the middle of this year and a near repeat of the faction-deepening solution attempted last October that was tenuously rectified in the

pact of mid-December.

At the supreme council meeting last Sunday, where the Sabah troubles were deliberated, PKR's lack of a clarifying and defining interlocutor was evident in the way the meeting's participants afterwards could not recall with certainty the details of the resolution that was agreed on.

This is proof of the dishevelment that prevailed, more indication of the need for someone with mediation skills.

If there need be a contest for the No 2 position in the party, this void in the hierarchy will have to be met by the aspirants if PKR are not to lurch giddily when factional strife next breaks out in its ranks.

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