

**Syed Husin: Only time can test a leader**  
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EXCLUSIVE It marked an end of an era for Parti Keadilan Rakyat when its long-serving deputy president Syed Husin Ali announced he will not defend his post, in order to make way for younger blood.

But even before hNONEe announced his intention at a press conference last Tuesday, many eyes were fixed on who his successor will be out of the closely-watched race between vice-president Azmin Ali and supreme council member Zaid Ibrahim.

And despite Syed Husin being a relatively diminutive man, it will certainly take a lot to fill his rather large shoes.

So who exactly does the veteran politician, PKR's deputy president since 2003, have in mind as his successor?

All he is prepared to say is that he would like to see a leader who has just not been in the party for a long time but one who is "tried and tested".

A party leader is also one who is discreet and does not air dirty laundry in the public, he said.

"We need someone who has organisational discipline. If he is made a member of any bureau in the party, he has to attend meetings and not complain about attending the meetings.

"He should complain within the party... and we've always advised the members to use the media as the last resort. To resolve things within the party first. And this goes for all members, not just any one person."

Despite being coy about naming who he is throwing his support for, his allegiance to party de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim and president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail is very clear.

At the preNONEs conference when he announced his retirement, Syed Husin had also said he prefers the husband and wife to fill the top two spots in PKR.

Among his reasons were that this would strengthen the party, and create a clear line of succession.

"But since Anwar has decided not to contest, the issue of succession will ultimately lie with the membership," he said.

Asked about the future of the party if both are ousted, Syed Husin said he does not see such a possibility, even in the distant future.

"I don't know under what circumstances these two can be rejected or discredited. If so, there must be something wrong with them, because not all members will be agents of some other party.

"If they pursue the policies of PKR, safely and follow the organisational structure of the

party, they can survive, for very long.

'Saboteurs' in the party

In the midst of the first direct elections to be held in a political party of this magnitude in Malaysia, it is not just about electing the right people.

It is also about the process that goes along with it.

When PKR passed a resolution last year to amend its constitution to allow for direct elections in their congress, paving the way for democracy in the truest sense of the word, many cynics shook their heads in disbelief.

It was unheard of in the Malaysian political culture, where party leaders are typically elected by delegates who may or may not act on the wishes of the grassroots.

Leaving the power to decide on the PKR leadership in the hands of some hundreds of thousands of delegates are bound to cause difficulties as well as create a logistical nightmare.

The run-up to the elections has already seen several rumours being circulated about agent provocateurs among the 400,000 members eligible to vote, who are said to be out to sabotage the party.

"There is some truth to the rumours," said Syed Husin, who is also chairperson of PKR's disciplinary board, noting that membership had been on a steady increase even before the elections were announced.

"If there are genuine new members who want to become party leaders, we can't stop them. But we are aware that there are some people who want to manipulate the new members for their personal agenda.

"It's very difficult to identify all the saboteurs. But ultimately, they will unmask themselves by their words and actions. And we can only do something after they've exposed themselves. I suppose, in the future, the party will have to be more careful about the people who want to join," he said.

"But whatever their intentions may be, the membership should close ranks and move on after the coming elections. You shouldn't threaten to leave the party if you lose. That would be wrong."

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