

**All that may be wrong with PKR elections**  
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PKR won respect for being first political party to allow the grassroots to elect its leadership. But its latest batch of divisional AGMs last weekend has brought it infamy , with several cases of fighting, disruptions and vandalism.

These came despite assurances and claims by party officials that foolproof measures had been put in place to meet the challenges of giving the vote to all of its 400,000 members.

Finger-pointing started as fast as news of the troubles broke, with different quarters giving their own versions of what went wrong.

Some, like Kapar parliamentarian S Manikavasagam (*right*), blamed the problems on the lack of preparation on the part of the PKR elections committee.

He told *Bernama* yesterday that the presence of only three election officers and the lack of adequate security at the divisional headquarters during the elections, which involved up to 3,000 members voting, were mistakes.

"The names of candidates who had pulled out were still on the ballot papers, and the ballot boxes were made of cardboard and were not sealed," Manikavasagam complained.

Teething problems a major reason

The problem with ballot papers is shared by the Subang division, headed by PKR vice-president R Sivarasa, who told *Malaysiakini* that they too experienced "technical" difficulties with the names of some candidates missing from the ballot paper.



PKR secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution (*left*) attributed these matters to 'teething problems' which the party would have to go through, since this is the first time direct elections are being practised in any political party in the country.

While she did not actually say that the party had been caught with its pants down, PKR elections committee head Molly Cheah admitted that there were problems, and conceded that election coordinators lacked resources.

"Some of the volunteers who were supposed to help out left, leaving us shorthanded. I also admit that they were some mistakes.

"We underestimated the workload. We underestimated the number of people who turned up. We expected only 40 percent to turn up, but a lot more came," she explained.

Cheah said the party would be better prepared for the direct elections for the national leadership elections, which she acknowledged would see more members coming out to vote,





and present greater challenges as well.

"We will get more resources. We did not anticipate the numbers that turned up (for the divisional polls, but that situation can be easily remedied. For example, we will print 100 percent of the ballot papers, so that we will have enough on hand," she said.

Cheah (*left*) also said members who complained about the lack of officials and security should have, on their part, acted responsibly.

"There is no reason to turn to violence. There are issues, but these people did not have to make it worse by getting violent," she said.

Though sources close to the party said that not only were a number of members unruly, but some party "bigwigs", were also throwing their weight around in what has been seen as an attempt to influence voting.

Asked about the allegations of unruly members and interference from party leaders in the elections process, Cheah said action would be taken if the allegations were proven true.

"In divisions where elections were postponed, PKR may exclude those who broke the rules of contest (once the polls are resumed) and in divisions where the results have been announced, we may move to nullify the elections if irregularities are found," she added.

Outside intervention also blamed

Manikavasagam also claimed that there were outsiders who interfered in the election process.



His claim is supported by Kota Raja division chief Dr Xavier Jayakumar (*left*), who said put the cause of the problems as "not technical matters" but the interference of "outside parties".

"We have enough security, we have the biggest number of election staff and the premises were secured. Ours was the only division, I think, that had Rela on duty. We had enough ballot papers, enough boxes and everything," said the Selangor executive councillor.

Xavier explained that the voting process had taken longer than expected, which he attributed to the sheer numbers of members who turned up.

"The troubles were started by saboteurs from outside, who wanted to nullify the election that was conducted," he claimed.

Saifuddin had also made a similar statement yesterday, pointing the finger at outside saboteurs as the culprits.

However, BN deputy head and deputy premier Muhyiddin Yassin has pooh-poohed the claim, challenging Saifuddin to furnish proof that outside influence was involved.

Healthy competition still alive

Political analyst James Chin, of Monash University, attributed the cause of the "feverish and spirited campaigning" to Pakatan Rakyat's desire to make it to Putrajaya in the next general election.

"The fight is heated this time around because people are thinking PKR will win big in the next general election, and they want to be picked as candidates," he said.

Chin agreed with Saifuddin and Jayakumar, saying that such things are bound to happen in PKR, a party that is scavenging its members from Barisan Nasional parties.

"These people are the so-called troublemakers. If you go through the history of the mischief, you would find that they have the same sort of history in BN parties.

"They can't enter PAS and don't think they can make it in DAP. So they join PKR, and the party can't just turn away people who claim to support them," Chin reasoned.

However, he believes that it is still healthy competition, as long as it doesn't destabilise the party, unlike the fight for the PKR number two post, which he said had the potential to wreak havoc within the party.

"It cannot be avoided, but the question, is how to manage it?" he said.

While some PKR leaders may look at these as teething problems the adolescent party goes through as a rite of passage to adulthood, they still have to ensure the party is managed properly if it is not to suffer an erosion of public confidence.

