



# PEMILIHAN 2010

**Torchbearer of reform still?**  
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If there is anything that one can say about Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) these days, it is that the party now looks increasingly like an epitome of Barisan Nasional.

No doubt, the party is of no fixed abode when it comes to ideology, mostly due to its diverse membership and volatile public support, as seen from its dramatic jump from one parliamentarian to 31 at the last general election.

But elasticity does not equal opportunism. Possession of the former quality means a party is able to adapt to constantly changing realities and voter demands without bending its long-held principles, whereas cashing in on others' misfortune and shambles in utter disregard of consequences could signal the downward spiral leading all the way to eventual demise.

Unless the term 'reform' means no more than building a populist coalition backed by members and leaders of all shapes and sizes, PKR still has to convince the electorate that its *raison d'être* is to dismantle the obnoxious race politics in Malaysia and effect real changes with ideals and capabilities.

Sadly, this is not how the party appears to be. Ever since the party elections got under way, PKR has been beset with factional conflicts, bitter accusations and brawls. While one may accept that inexperience with direct party election - which involves the grassroots and makes all outcomes highly unpredictable - is responsible for the chaos, some elements that the public has witnessed so far are clearly inexcusable.

Endless mudslinging

Granted, factions are a necessary evil in party politics. But a broad church can only be strengthened and buttressed by healthy debates and constructive engagements of all streams. On the other hand, resentment, acrimony and personal vendetta will destroy a party in no time, however promising it once was.

So far, I am yet to hear things that sound close to the word 'reform' from any of the leadership hopefuls, and it is hard not to agree with many that all that the public is getting from PKR over the past few weeks is endless mud slinging that goes right to the highest echelons of the party, with each side trading bemusing and even childish accusations one after another.



The contest between Azmin Ali and Zaid Ibrahim, the two heavyweight candidates for deputy president, has now descended into a melodramatic pot-boiler. There is certainly a huge audience out there, but the quality leaves much to be desired.

Instead of taking pot shots at each other, why can't the two men campaign to win the hearts and minds of the masses on concrete programmes such as reform on the judiciary, economy, education, human



rights and political structure of the country?

Stop using the much abused pretext that Malaysia as a developing nation is ill-equipped for policy debate and that Malaysians are generally more interested in form rather than substance. If this is the case, there would not have been a series of massive demonstrations calling for change and reform over the past few years.

Even if I were to consider this substandard excuse, it still would not absolve politicians of their obligation to raise the levels of Malaysian politics by moving beyond personal feuds and sensationalism.

For reasons best known to himself, Zaid agreed to pull out of the race only if Nurul Izzah entered the fray for the deputy post. Yet most major political parties in the country are already more feudalistic than their counterparts in the Indian subcontinent: Umno (Najib Abdul Razak, Khairy Jamaluddin, Mukhriz Mahathir, etc), Gerakan (Lim Keng Yeik and Lim Si Pin), DAP (Lim Kit Siang and Lim Guan Eng). Do Malaysians deserve another political dynasty?

'Dodgy character'

And then there was news of Lee Chong Meng quitting MCA and joining PKR yesterday. Nicknamed *Doktor Ayam*, Lee was suspended by his previous party two years ago over allegations of misuse of government funds. He has yet to clear his name.

To say that Lee's (*right*) track record as Bukit Bintang MCA chief has been unmemorable is an understatement. In fact, he did nothing to improve the political culture in the country, and is totally bereft of refreshing ideas and views.

Has anyone heard him speak up on justice, police brutality, corruption and transparency? I only remember he sought to deter a female candidate from being fielded in Bukit Bintang by saying that the 'rough' area was ill-suited for a woman politician. Thank goodness, he went on to lose by nearly 15,000 votes in March 2008.

It defies logic for a party that is premised on reform to offer political refuge to a dodgy character like Lee. Should the party field him just to satisfy his ambitions, I would be ready to campaign against him.

If reform is really what PKR stands for, it must do its utmost to show that it is much more than just a recycle bin for political has-beens. Start conducting party affairs in a fashion that is remarkably different from the BN, or risk making a mockery of new politics and end up losing more public trust than Umno. I'd shed no tears when the day comes.

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