

Zaid's outbursts the undoing of Anwar?

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ANALYSIS When embattled former PKR Federal Territories chairperson Zaid Ibrahim announced on his blog in the wee hours of Monday morning that he would be withdrawing from the race for party deputy presidency, the decision caught many even his closest supporters by surprise.

Although it has been widely speculated and discussed that the maverick politician has long thought about throwing in the towel in what he believed was a farcical party elections, it was said that his running mates only discovered his decision at the same time as everyone else.

But what caught even more people by surprise was Zaid's outburst against party de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim and his blue-eyed boy Azmin Ali.

zaid ibrahim pc 091110 supporters 02During a press conference on Tuesday at Zaid's lush bungalow in a gated country club community, just a day after he announced his withdrawal and resignation from all party posts, his disgruntlement against the party leadership appeared to have touched boiling point.

While it is not entirely uncharacteristic of Zaid to hit out at his bitter rival Azmin, his stinging salvos at Anwar pushes him to a wholly different level.

In a party where Anwar is hailed as an icon and the party's raison d'etre, calling him the source of all problems may be seen by many as sheer insolence.

Cooling-off period

Former party communications chief Jonson Chong was one of the few who raised his eyebrows when he heard of the attacks on the party supremo.

"I was surprised, but I understand his sentiments. I've worked with Anwar before. He had many strengths and as an active leader, we need to complement him. But with Anwar, some tough decisions have to be made," he said.

NONEChong (centre), who had previously openly declared his support for Zaid in the triumvirate contest with Azmin and fellow deputy presidency candidate Mustaffa Kamil Ayub, he was naturally defensive of Zaid.

But even then, he was cautious when speaking to Malaysiakini.

"We should all cool off for a while. I spoke to (party president) Wan Azizah Wan Ismail yesterday. I suggested to her that there is no point crying over spilt milk. Or pointing fingers at who spilt the milk. The milk has been spilt and what's important is how to fix this," he said philosophically.

Perhaps aware of the volatility of Zaid's conduct in a party filled with factious groups, Chong said that the best thing now for party members is to stop speculating on the former's statements.

"Politicking and infighting is not what we need now," he said.

'Disastrous campaign from the start'

However, political observers suggested that there was no one particular incident that led to the break up, but more an accumulative efforts of Zaid digging his own grave.

NONEPolitical analyst Ong Kian Ming (right) opined that it was a campaign doomed to failure right from the start.

"Zaid started his campaign by attacking Anwar. He also kicked off his campaign on the basis that he would lose. So it was quite a consistent trend - his campaign was a negative one," said Ong.

"His strategy in trying to get pockets of support was right, but his execution was terrible. He could have run a more positive campaign and attracted more non-Malay leaders.

"Instead he alienated a lot of people, including 'whacking' (deputy president) Syed Husin Ali," he said, referring to the infamous nyanyuk episode.

Zaid had previously told an online portal that septuagenarian Syed Husin was nyanyuk (senile) in retaliation to the latter's criticism that he was not a team player and had been skipping party meetings.

Zaid later explained he said that he called Syed Husin nyanyu (speaking nonsense and gibberish), which is still not much of a difference when the party's grassroots are steeped in the Malay culture of respect towards elders.

In fact, Zaid still seemed to be unaffected by the brickbats, not mincing his words even as recently as Tuesday when he called Syed Husin "old" before dismissing party meetings as "ritualistic and a waste of time".

It will not be the last of Zaid

Although Zaid's campaign has come to an end when he announced that he would be dropping out from the ongoing polls, it is quite certain that the former lawyer who had founded the country's biggest law firm, will not be silenced.

Starting with a "special briefing" for his supporters in Kedah last night, it is expected that it will be the beginning of a nationwide roadshow.

Although a big question mark hangs over his itinerary considering that it is pointless for him to canvass support for the party elections, it is understood that it is to get an "anti-Azmin/Anwar" movement of sorts going, apart from influencing his supporters to call a halt to the polls.

boycott the newspaper pc 280108 haris ibrahim Apart from that, there are already rumours that Zaid is likely to form his own party, or at least, to generate a 'third force' - possibly a Pakatan-friendly NGO.

"This will definitely not be the last we see of him. It looks likely that he will form a third-force party. But one thing is for sure, even if he forms it with his supporters like (prominent blogger) Haris Ibrahim (left) or (lawyer) Malik Imtiaz Sarwar, Zaid will eventually alienate them.

"He will continue to fire at PKR. That man is not easily controlled," said Ong, who described Zaid as a "loose cannon".

Party's image takes a hit

Even as Zaid launched his missiles at party leaders, whether at the sidelines or inside the ring itself, PKR - forged in the time of high crisis back in 1998 during Anwar's sacking as deputy prime minister - will try not to let this crisis to affect the party, too much.

"PKR is down but not out. If he leaves, it is not just good for PKR but Pakatan as a whole. Everyone can move on, assuming that he doesn't create more problems. With the way Zaid is going, nobody is spared his wrath," said Ong.

But thus far, his net effect of his wrath is an all-time low public image for the party, once regarded as the beacon of reforms.

For Monash University Malaysia political analyst James Chin, this episode will affect the party in the short term, at most.

"There will not be long-term damage. PKR has a lot of young capable people. The ones creating problems are the older generation," he said.

When asked if the criticism and charges levelled against Anwar will affect the public perception of the party, Chin said that it might.

pkp headquarters nominations anwar ibrahim "It will affect the credibility among the middle class. But the fallout will be limited," he said.

And if there is anything to learn from this episode, the one with most to grasp is Anwar himself.

Chong said that this should be a wake-up call for Anwar, while Ong said that Azmin cannot take his grassroot support for granted, considering that Zaid managed to win 38 divisions compared to the former's 37.

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