

Anwar faces crunch time in PKR congress
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Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim will try to repair his damaged party at an annual congress this weekend, after a bruising bout of infighting that has hurt its prospects of seizing power.

Internal leadership elections in PKR, which serves as the glue in the three-member opposition alliance, exposed deep factional rifts and dented its image as a credible alternative government.

The brawling erupted just as speculation intensifies that the BN coalition, which is regaining ground after 2008 polls where it was humbled by the opposition, is preparing to hold snap polls early next year.

One of PKR's leading lights, a former government minister who switched to the opposition in 2008, quit last week saying he was "sick of the sick leaders in the party" and that the party vote was marred by fraud.

Tian Chua, the party's strategy director, admitted there was much work to be done this weekend when some 2,000 party delegates will gather for two days to chart the party's future and reassure the rank-and-file.

"I admit some supporters are anxious about whether our party elections have dented public support," he said.

"The leadership's immediate concern is to strengthen the party following its recent party election and prepare for possible snap polls," he said.

"I am confident in a few months' time we can put in place a stable party."

BN more attractive, Anwar's chance slim

The 2008 elections were a watershed in the multicultural nation, resulting in a stampede towards the opposition among minority Chinese and Indians, and a weakening of support for the government from its voter base of Malays.

However, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak who was appointed last year has worked to lure back minorities, and introduced measures to revitalise the economy, which had stagnated under his predecessors.

The coalition, which in 2008 looked like it was near the end of a half-century reign over Malaysia, now looks somewhat more attractive.

James Chin, a professor of political science at Monash University's campus in Kuala Lumpur, tipped national polls to be held in the next few months and said that Anwar's prospects of seizing power are now slim.

"PKR is still strong, they have support especially among the young and first-time voters. But they are losing support from older Malay voters," he said.

Anwar, a former deputy premier who was sacked and jailed a decade ago on sex and

corruption charges widely seen as politically motivated, has this year been mired in another gruelling trial on new sodomy charges.

"Anwar is still popular, Malaysians feel he is being persecuted.

"But the longer the sodomy trial proceeds, it will tie him down and make him less effective.

"Everybody thinks he will be found guilty and go to jail," Chin said.

- AFP

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