

Azmin sets up battle royal with Zaid in PKR
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COMMENT And so it's official. PKR vice-president Azmin Ali has announced on Malaysia Day that he is contesting the party's deputy presidency at the upcoming polls.

This sets the stage for a likely battle with Zaid Ibrahim for the No.2 spot in the Opposition group.

One commentator has described the tussle between the two party archrivals as "fiery".

While division leaders may be in favour of Azmin, some say the majority of grassroots prefer Zaid - "a thinking man who is first Malaysian."

While the contest was more or less expected, the timing and announcement made in Sabah, considered a Zaid stronghold, came as a shock to party members.

Azmin's candidacy, timing and place of the announcement has led to inferences that the fight is going to be a brawl, dispensing with Queensbury rules that is associated, usually, with gentlemen and boxing...and very rarely in politics.

Azmin nonchalantly denied that the contest with Zaid would split the party and said that he had consulted top party leaders including incumbent deputy president Senator Dr Syed Husin Ali who had stepped down earlier this week from defending the post.

Even greenhorn politicians know that any "fiery" contest at this stage of a party's genesis has the potential of festering into a divisive and dangerous tumour long after the results and winner have been announced.

Zaid, the former de facto law minister, is also a PKR supreme council member. While in the government, he had pushed for legal and judicial reforms that would have removed many of what have been described as "shackles to democracy" like the ISA.

But his reformation platform did not go down well with the Umno teammates who saw it as an erosion of their powers and he was eventually sacked from the party after several dubious allegations and his criticism over the arrests of DAP MP Teresa Kok, blogger Raja Petra Kamaruddin and journalist Tan Hoon Cheng under the ISA.

Azmin, the Bukit Antarabangsa assemblyman, on the other hand, was once party de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim's aide when the latter was in government

He has received the support of 20 PKR MPs and the majority of state lawmakers in Negri Sembilan and Selangor.

PKR Youth chief Shamsul Iskandar Akin, who is expected to announce his decision to contest one of the four vice-presidents' posts has thrown his support behind Azmin.

In announcing his candidacy on Thursday, Azmin claimed that he fulfilled the criteria set by outgoing deputy president, which included having "high moral values."

The reference to "moral values" is ominous.

During the closely fought Hulu Selangor by-elections earlier this year when Zaid narrowly lost to BN, doctored pictures of the de facto law minister holding a bottle of alcohol surfaced among other questionable allegations which at the end of day, counted for nothing.

The by-election results were too close for the "moral values" to be of any significance.

But Zaid may have pushed the envelope a little too far in trying to bring reforms now to PKR. He has also asked Anwar to contest the post of presidency to legitimise his (Anwar) position in the party.

This may not have gone down well with Anwar who says he will decline all nominations.

So far, Zaid has not received any endorsement from any senior party leader.

But the veteran lawyer is said to be popular among Sabah and Sarawak PKR members as well as the non-Malay populace within and without the party in West Malaysia.

An indication that Azmin has already been endorsed by the powers comes straight from the proverbial horse's mouth during Thursday's announcement: "After taking into account the views of senior leaders and party members and following direct discussion with Dr Syed Husin Ali, I, in all humility, wish to offer myself for the position."

One reader at Malaysian Insider has described Azmin's bid for the No 2 spot as "just might be what the BN wants...an election that rips the party apart...UMNO '87 elections come to mind. So be it. Be eternally remembered as the man who destroyed a promising party and opposition. Que Sera Sera."

The party obviously will not come apart because of this contest but what is critical is for the right man to win the spot and eventually lead the party.

Nominations for national posts and divisional meetings begin this weekend. The divisions will vote for national leaders on weekends, from October 29 to November 21.

Que Sera Sera, indeed.

* The views expressed here are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of Malaysian Mirror and/or its associates.

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