

**PKR infighting: Tussle for power and position?**  
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KUALA LUMPUR - The troubled PKR divisional meetings on Sunday are just one of the examples or signs of intense infighting for power and positions between the pioneer "reformasi" (reformation) group and those who joined the party after the 2008 general election, according to political analysts.

They say the conflict between these two groups has become more evident lately, especially when those who joined the party after March 2008 started vying for party positions in large numbers.

"Unless the leadership can curb it, it looks very much like they are fighting for positions with certain personalities involved. Although the party has 400,000 members, the fence-sitters are watching these elections closely," says Dr Sivamurugan Pandian, a political analyst at Universiti Sains Malaysia.

He says the fence-sitters among the voters are watching these elections closely to gauge the level of maturity of the leaders, and they may take the cue from there before they vote in the next general election.

"The people are watching closely as to what these people are fighting for? (Is it) for the people (at large) or to strengthen the power base of certain people in the party?" he adds.

Dr Sivamurugan says a party position is vital for some of these leaders to be assured of nomination to contest in the next general election.

"The problem actually goes much deeper. Almost half of the divisional elections are a tussle between these two groups. It is only the first-level elections, just the election of divisional chiefs. What will happen when they go for the national leadership next month?" he asks.

Another political analyst, Prof James Chin of Monash University, concurs with the view that the intense contest in the PKR divisional elections is due to the fact that they want to fight for positions in order to guarantee their candidacy in the next general election.

"However, this is not a problem as it is part of the learning process. This is the first time they are doing it (direct party elections)," he says.

But, for political analyst and former politician James Wong, what happened during the PKR divisional elections does not paint a good picture on the neutral voters.

"During the campaign period, there are already signs that the leaders are involved in much personal polemics. Many people expect PKR to be good. A contest is a contest, but they must not get personal," he says.

Wong explains that before the last general election, there was high expectation that the opposition has a "moral alternative" to be better than BN and it was on that ground that the opposition PKR-DAP-PAS pact or Pakatan Rakyat (PR) managed to deny BN a two-third majority in parliament.

"PR all this while has given the impression to the people that they are the 'moral alternative'. Now you are becoming like what happened in the MIC and MCA before, throwing chairs and so on," he says.

PKR secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution said today seven PKR divisions had to postpone their AGMs and polls following reports of vandalism and technical hiccups.

He said interim reports suggested that the postponement of the divisional AGMs was due to delays by election monitors and the higher-than-expected attendance compared to the 2004 and 2007 meetings. They also blamed it on "disturbances by non-party members who provoked the elections" to put the PKR in a bad light.

Moreover, he said, out of 166 divisions, 159 or 96% had completed their AGMs and 39 more divisions would be completing theirs by this weekend.

Wong says, however, that the opposition pact may regard what happened at the Sunday PKR divisional meetings as a small matter, but they still need to take into account the public perception of the matter.

"Even if the hole is small, it is still not good. What the people have now is a tainted hope. If they take it for granted, the BN will benefit from it in the next election," he says. —  
*Bernama*

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