

# Party must live with bickering

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Picture this political scenario.

The party president is being challenged, a friend of the party adviser claims he was back-stabbed by the very person he trusted, and a few others allege that their reformasi hero has been meddling in the run-up to the party polls.

That is the state of Parti Keadilan Rakyat, born out of support for the then jailed Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim almost a decade ago.

The drama has set the stage for what looks to be an explosive event at the party's three-day congress in Seremban beginning today.

President Datin Seri Wan Azizah Ismail is being challenged by former treasurer Abdul Rahman Othman. Anwar, too, has been nominated for the post, with the highest number of nominations from party divisions.

In the three-cornered fight, Anwar and his wife are facing

a challenger who has gone from a gentleman's campaign to questioning Anwar's eligibility to contest and attacking his character.

For Abdul Rahman, Anwar, having been convicted in court, is not eligible to contest the post as he is barred from active politics by law until next April.

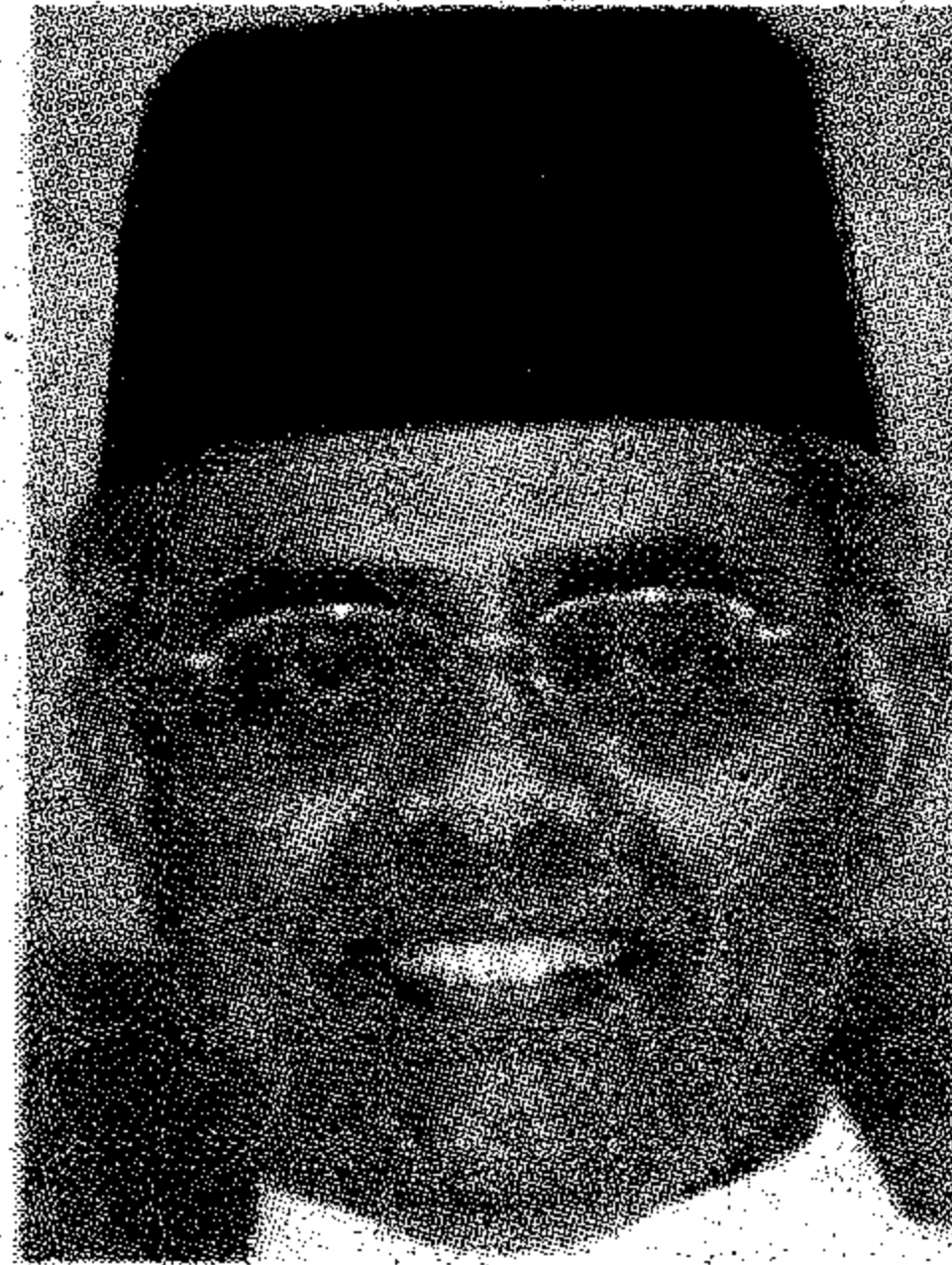
Without responding directly, Anwar said those who resorted to such claims were "Umno desperados".

Anwar's name is also being dragged into the controversy over Datuk K. Nallakarupan who claimed that his best friend (Anwar) who invited him to join the party last year had betrayed him.

Nallakarupan was upset when he was rejected as the party candidate for the recent Ijok by-election, and was even more dejected after Anwar allegedly advised him not to contest for one of the three vice-president posts.

He said he wanted to quit the party.

The party is also facing alle-



Abdul Rahman Othman has been nominated for the president's post

gations from other candidates who claimed that Anwar had been telling some of them to withdraw from contesting.

On that score, it appears that a fierce fight will dominate the party's congress.

The PKR Youth and Wanita wings will vote in their polls today while the election for the party leadership is scheduled for tomorrow.

Insiders, however, are unfazed by the political events, believing that Anwar has a strong grip on the party.

"It's a party that was formed because of him. Keadilan, or PKR, is all about Anwar.

"At best, this (situation) can be seen as the party being democratic. Anyone can challenge a leader and can hurl allegations at the leaders, without fear of reprisal.

"At worst, Anwar may lose a few potential leaders. Then again, he will gain others who are waiting in line," said a party insider.

PKR Youth deputy information chief Amir Sari believed that it was just a storm in a teacup, although he recognised the attacks against Anwar could cause bad blood among members and supporters after the congress.

But he believed Anwar could muster the support to make sure members closed ranks after the congress.

"It looks like Anwar will win the contest. Don't be surprised if Abdul Rahman finishes

third, behind Wan Azizah.

"The only problem will be when the Registrar of Societies decides to get involved," he said.

Anwar's lawyers have sent a letter to the registrar asking for exemption for the former deputy prime minister to lead the party.

However, it is expected that Abdul Rahman and possibly some Umno members would raise a commotion over the legitimacy of Anwar being leader of a party, as this would constitute "active politics".

An Anwar associate, Khalid Jaafar, said the problems were to be expected.

"When Anwar was in prison, there was a certain myth about him. Now party leaders and members have to deal with the real Anwar."

He said that being a smart political player, Anwar had to be a friend to everybody, catering to all their needs and demands.

At the same, he could not take an extreme position as he had to provide a middle

ground, said Khalid.

This may not bode well with certain people who wanted his full attention, he added.

While Abdul Rahman aimed to make PKR a party beyond Anwar, the rank and file were in awe of their "great leader".

But Anwar, too, had a problem convincing his supporters to shift from being a welfare-state party to a market-orientated and equal-opportunity one.

His gamble in the Ijok by-election, promoting the abolition of affirmative action, did not work well, especially in the Malay-majority area.

However, PKR will have a new leadership that is expected to steer the party towards Anwar's vision of what he claims to be a better alternative to race-based politics and policies.

Yet internal bickering will continue to dominate the party, which holds one seat in parliament.

PKR has to live with it; after all, it claims to be a democratic party.