

# Bumpy return to active politics for Anwar

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SOMETHING was amiss at the Parti Keadilan Rakyat youth congress in Seremban yesterday — the voters' list went missing for more than two hours, the debate was lame and delegates were more interested in going outside the meeting hall, allegedly to accuse "the other side" of sabotage.

One side was heard accusing party adviser Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim of meddling with the election process, by determining who should and should not contest. The other side blamed former youth leader Ezam Mohd Noor of putting up his people to make allegations against Anwar.

The results of the youth polls yesterday would not matter much. The discontent was real, and could likely set the pattern for today's poll and there-

after, the course of Anwar's political future.

Anwar's lawyers had sent a letter to the Registrar of Societies asking for an exemption from the "no active political involvement" clause following his conviction almost a decade ago.

Yesterday afternoon they received the reply — no, Anwar would not be allowed to contest for the party's presidency.

Anwar, however, decided to ignore the ROS' decision. He also asked his lawyers to appeal to the Home Minister.

Today, it is still going to be a three-cornered fight between him and challenger Abdul Rahman Othman, also the party's former treasurer, and incumbent Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail.

Although Anwar is set to win the contest, the problems within the party are not a mere storm in a tea cup, as some of his loyalists prefer to

portray them.

The pro-Anwar faction, the majority of delegates at all levels, are facing open criticism from the opposing faction, allegedly led by Ezam although he has denied it, and are on the defensive as Anwar is being grilled like never before.

Are these detractors trying to kill off their very own hero or are they merely a disgruntled group of people angry with Anwar for not pampering them enough?

Party vice president Azmin Ali, ever ready with a diplomatic answer, does not put the blame on Ezam, saying that both of them are still close friends despite major policy differences.

"I just hope leaders and members close ranks and focus on the future of the party. We call for change, we say it's time for change, but if we continue to damage the party, where will this lead us?"

The mood at yesterday's

youth congress was so subdued that some delegates wondered what had happened since last year's lively meeting in Penang.

Other delegates, who claimed they were not surprised by the lack of enthusiasm and blaming it on a fifth column in the movement, declined to speak on record.

While some party leaders complain of Anwar's meddling, his loyalists have countered that the accusers had allowed themselves to be manipulated from the outside, namely by Umno.

Without evidence, party insiders blame certain individuals in Umno who had been in contact with the faction that was allegedly trying hard to oust Anwar from the party.

"The strange thing is, they don't really mean to kick him out but are trying to blackmail him into accepting them as his closest cronies. That will be a problem because Anwar will

be trapped in a serious factionalism crisis," said a party insider.

The pro-Anwar faction also believes that the problem lies within the youth movement, because the party's women's wing has proven itself independent and well organised. Yesterday's women's meeting went on smoothly.

"Kudos to its leader Fuziah Salleh, who has led the women's wing well. PKR youth should learn something from our women leaders," said Parit Sulong division chief Hasmi Hashim.

Even if today's results show strong support for Anwar, his detractors will remain in the party. And Anwar does not have the luxury of kicking them out, as he needs as much help as he can get to face the next general election.

This is the beginning of Anwar's tough political life in a small party after many years in Umno.