

Anwar's tried and true inner circle

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A DAY after he was appointed de facto leader, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim did not waste time in showing off his power over Parti Keadilan Rakyat.

After the full results of the party polls were announced yesterday, instead of incumbent president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail, it was Anwar who announced the appointment of national leaders to complement the elected office-bearers.

Among his prominent appointees was Saifuddin Nasution, a former party stalwart who was PKR's Lunas assemblyman from 2000 to 2004 before he left active politics due to personal differences with some party leaders.

Saifuddin, once a staunch *reformasi* activist, is attached to a Pas state government agency assisting the poor in Kelantan. Now he has a major role to play in PKR.

He was appointed PKR's strategic adviser under the party's powerful political bureau headed by Anwar, along with party election director Azmin Ali, who retained his vice president's post.

Anwar also appointed former women's wing chief Fuziah Salleh as Azmin's deputy. Fuziah lost in the contest for the party's three elected vice-presidents.

The former deputy prime min-

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Azmin Ali
PKR vice-president

ister also rewarded loyalists Sivarasah Rasiah and Dr Jeffrey Kitingan to the two appointed vice-presidencies, and promoted treasurer Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim, who lost his bid in the Ijok by-election recently, as secretary-general.

The new treasurer is his personal friend William Leong, while information chief Tian Chua is retained.

Party insiders believe Anwar will strengthen his grip by appointing more trusted friends and supporters for the five seats in the party's supreme council and for each of the posts of state liaison chief.

"If necessary, he will create a few more posts. Yes, it may be the

appointment of his friends and close allies, but it will be good for the party to work towards a common goal," said an insider.

There are others unhappy with the situation, fearing it will create an elite based on one man's personality. But these disgruntled members may have forgotten the reason the party was formed.

This will be a different PKR as Anwar, whatever his followers call him, leads the party from the front towards creating an impact in the next general election.

Azmin announced that the party had identified 60 parliamentary and 120 state seats to fight for and would meet Pas and DAP separately to form an electoral pact.

"We're going to tell our allies that it's not necessary for a Chinese-majority seat to be contested by DAP and a Malay-majority one by Pas. There are new considerations for us to look into."

The three-day PKR congress was nothing special in terms of debate and quality of discussion but it had sporadic surprises and thrills.

There was even a faction calling itself the "Enlightenment" group which caused a minor stir in some, and disgust in others. Yet a couple of their candidates succeeded in the party polls.

One of them, Khalid Jaafar, who won a supreme council seat, claimed that it was a fresh start for believers of freedom and

openness to espouse their ideas against the welfare state, religious orthodoxy and racial supremacy.

But it will be a tough task for this group as party members seem comfortable with heavy state subsidies, price controls, salary caps and other forms of taxation on the rich to help the poor.

For new Youth chief Shamsul Iskandar Md Akin, it was more than just personality politics — younger members want to lead the way in promoting Anwar's ideals and policies to the grassroots.

"We will be different from the previous leadership in terms of creating more grassroots leaders instead of depending on certain individuals," he said.

While little mention was made of former Youth chief Ezam Mohd Noor, allegedly behind some of the agitation in the Youth wing a few days ago, it was Anwar who came to his defence.

"I thank Ezam for creating the Youth movement for the party and appreciate all that he has done," he said.

Whether that was sincerely meant, only PKR members, especially the next generation leaders, can decide.

They have a tough job to do. Anwar's words have always been sweet to their ears but to win as many seats as possible in the next general election, that is a totally different proposition.