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# PKR ebbs as Anwar plays Mr Nice Guy

THE mood and morale in Parti Keadilan Rakyat now is so low that a third of its 69 elected representatives, it seems, don't care two hoots about what happens to the party any more. And people say it has a lot to do with Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's crabby obsession to become prime minister at all costs.

Politically-charged as this may sound, the sentiment came not from ordinary political observers on the sidelines or insignificant party castaways but a few key PKR figures I spoke to last week. And all this is happening less than two years after the party swept into the reckoning by winning the most seats among opposition parties in that fateful March 2008 general election, which enabled it to lead the government in Selangor, the richest state, and pushed the agenda of its leader Anwar further.

"The spirit of 3/08 (the general election) is gone and PKR is at rock bottom," said one of the insiders. "It is rudderless and there is no compass."

These characters shall remain nameless in this article for some expedient reasons in this politically volatile period. But they are definitely people of some standing in PKR, one of whom is known to be a true Anwar loyalist.

They said matters took a turn for the worse in the party lately with Anwar spending a lot of time abroad to garner foreign support ahead of his court case.

This effort to win in the court of public opinion abroad on the sodomy charges against him is well known. And it is best seen from the spin coming out of certain international TV news channels and a string of opinion pieces in influential newspapers in the last few weeks as the hearing, now in progress, drew near.

Two days ago, for instance, *The Washington Post* ran an editorial entitled *Why the prosecution of Malaysia's Anwar Ibrahim matters to the West* and very presumptuously



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concluded (in a case that has barely gone beyond its first witness) that "the imprisonment of Mr Anwar would be a blatant human rights violation — and not in Malaysia's interest" as far as the Barack Obama administration and Western governments are concerned.

One insider said: "Because of his constant attention to shoring up backing from abroad, his foot was off the pedal on internal party matters, leaving certain leaders without the appropriate soft skills to take the wheel. And these characters are running riot, alienating people beyond their levels and causing uneasiness among the party's MPs and ADUNs (elected state representatives).

"I dare say that at least a third of the PKR MPs and a third of its ADUNs feel that the party can go to hell with what's happening now. And they are just this short of saying the same thing about Anwar personally."

It seems that Anwar, with the court case and all that's happening around him, only wants to be Mr Nice Guy now among party members and to him, the fewer enemies the better. But some of his supporters are getting tired with his fixation with becoming prime minister at all costs — especially his cliched assurances of "*bila aku jadi PM, aku tukarlah semuanya*" (when I become PM, I will set it right) simply to deflect the many circumstances of hardship faced by party members in their support of him.

The insiders said the alienation of real talent would spell the most trouble for PKR and the name that always cropped up in conversations on this issue was former secretary-general Datuk Salehuddin Hashim, who re-



Datuk Salehuddin Hashim's decision to step down as secretary-general of Parti Keadilan Rakyat is a big blow to the party.

signed recently.

"This, I would say, is the party's real loss because this was one man who could do a lot but the party didn't know how to use him," said another source.

Many in PKR reckon that Salehuddin, given his skills in political economics and his track record, would be the ideal person to plan strategies to counter the expected BN onslaught to recapture Selangor.

Salehuddin, a political activist who can double up as corporate strategist, has been on the scene since the early days of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the helm. But he has always been a backroom sort of person and that, according to the PKR insiders, was where he was most comfortable — organising, mobilising and communicating.

Once he remarked that as secretary-general, some people had expected him to be in the frontline

shouting slogans. "I tried to put my foot in and do what some politicians wanted me to. But the water was not to my liking."

Salehuddin is said to be frustrated with the interference that had made it difficult for him to utilise his skills as a strategist.

His background is impressive. He was the project director for the first major privatisation project in the country, the North-South Expressway in 1985. Then he left to set up his own management practice, Turnaround Managers Incorporated, in 1987.

He also worked in the United States and turned around an oil and gas drilling company, Hercules Offshore Corporation in Houston. His team bought the bankrupt company for US\$20 million (RM64 million) in 1993 and sold it for US\$200 million in 1996. "Till today people are still talking about it in Houston," his friends

would say.

He returned to Malaysia and became the executive chairman of public-listed oil and gas company Tenergy Bhd in 1997 and built the first floating processing storage and off-loading (FPSO) vessel locally.

He also built the Marang Resort and Safari in Terengganu, which won the International Real Estate Federation's best international resort award in 1996. In the previous year, the award was given to Disneyland Paris.

"Salehuddin and many others like him in PKR are disillusioned. But Anwar's in it only for himself," said the insider.

By the way, is it a coincidence that the American aircraft carrier USS *Nimitz* is docked at Port Klang now when the Anwar trial is in full swing?