

Pakatan stronger after Selangor MB debacle, now focus on leadership

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Was there any doubt that PAS would come through and support PKR's proposal for its president Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail to take over as Selangor Menteri Besar from Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim?

The short answer is yes. And for the past 24 days since PKR officially proposed her name, the coalition of three parties – PKR, PAS and DAP – have been held hostage to the idea that the Islamist party might have other ideas about the Selangor menteri besar issue.

But the PAS leadership came through today, deciding that Dr Wan Azizah and her deputy, Azmin Ali, can replace Khalid – the second-term MB sacked last week for disobeying party orders to resign from the job.

Component party leaders and officials agree that the Islamist party's decision has strengthened the pact that came about after Election 2008 and won more seats in the 2013 general election.

But they also realise the Selangor debacle has taken some shine off their rule in the country's wealthiest state, ironically opposite the aims of the Kajang Move which was to enhance and strengthen the PR government in the state.

The episode has also shown that ties between the parties are very strong on the ground in the past two general elections and countless by-elections but the opposite among the leadership.

Officials from the three parties concede that some leaders are very friendly to each other but some are just working-level colleagues with distrust over their personal political ambitions.

"Maybe we could have avoided it if the PKR leaders had spoken to their allies to explain the Kajang Move way before proposing Wan Azizah's name. But it was not done.

"We have to focus on the leadership now so that we can avoid similar problems in the future," one official told The Malaysian Insider.

It is an open secret that PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang is not close to PKR de facto leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim – a fact exposed in a quick meeting to resolve the Selangor MB issue last week.

Coalition sources also said it took DAP leaders Lim Guan Eng and Lim Kit Siang to keep channels open among the top leadership in the respective parties in the past three weeks.

"Fact is, the DAP was the only party that was solidly behind Dr Wan Azizah. The others had issues but it took patience and time to clear the air and move on," one source said.

The PAS decision today, they said, was a result of hard work within PAS and also in PR to ensure that the pact can continue to ensure further success.

"The PAS decision has shown that we have to act in concert, we cannot act alone. We are stronger from this episode." Guan Eng, DAP secretary-general, told The Malaysian Insider this afternoon.

PR runs three states – Kelantan, Penang and Selangor – and now holds 87 federal seats.

But he admitted that PR will have to work doubly hard to overcome the political and administrative fallout from the past three weeks when only DAP and PKR were quick to back Dr Wan Azizah but PAS leaders demurred and pleaded for more time.

"We have three years to make up for what happened. I am sure that can be done," Lim said.

PAS central working committee member Dr Dzukefly Ahmad agreed that PR is now stronger after the Selangor MB impasse.

"The decision strengthens PR and we can now replace Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim," said Dr Dzukefly, a leading strategist in PAS for the past two general elections, who has worked closely with other PR allies to keep the pact strong.

PKR communications director Fahmi Fadzil hailed the PAS decision today as "an important milestone in the maturing process of coalition politics".

"Conflict resolution as we've seen in this extended episode is a prerequisite for a functional and pragmatic working relationship between the PR component parties.

"I think PAS has taken a very pragmatic approach. This shows us that PAS is far from being a mono-culture political entity, possesses rich and diverse voices and opinions," he said.

But he agreed the coalition "will have to work doubly hard to repair the bad image that has resulted from this imbroglio".

"I think these differences can be overcome," Fahmi said, adding the infusion and inclusion of younger leaders into the parties will ensure changes for the better before the next general elections.

One coalition leader put it succinctly, saying "This is just the first step in a long journey for us in Selangor. We have a lot of work to do." – August 17, 2014.

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