

## **With PKR presidency, Anwar can begin paving his way to Putrajaya**

**MALAY MAIL**

**August 6, 2018**

**By Ram Anand**

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 6 — After close to two decades of acting as godfather for opposition parties and coalitions in Malaysia, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim finally has a formal, elected position in PKR, the party he founded.

Anwar yesterday won the PKR presidency uncontested. Despite murmurs of a possible challenge by incumbent deputy president Datuk Seri Mohamed Azmin Ali, it was clear that no one else in the party was ready to take on a man that secretary general Datuk Saifuddin Nasution Ismail had described as an “institution”.

Having been a mainstay in Malaysian politics for the past 30 years, Anwar was never going to be in the shadows for too long once the coalition he co-founded, Pakatan Harapan (PH), won federal power for the first time in Malaysian history during the May 9 general elections.

He was clearly named the 8th Prime Minister of Malaysia in the coalition’s manifesto; he is scheduled to take over from Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in a couple of years.

However, with his party’s formal backing, Anwar can now begin positioning himself to take over as PM and possibly put to bed any speculation of attempts to sideline him from the limelight.

Anwar, who turns 71 next week, already hinted at a parliamentary by-election in the horizon, which would ostensibly be orchestrated to enable him to return as an elected lawmaker.

“I think Anwar is anxious to ensure that he will take over from (Dr Mahathir) as scheduled,” said Oh Ei Sun, principal adviser at Pacific Research Centre.

“It is almost guaranteed (that Anwar would contest soon),” he added.

However, PKR would be wary of the low turnout during the Sg Kandis by-election, where only 49 per cent of voters turned up to vote. With more by-elections in Balakong and Seri Setia coming up, the party could delay forcing a by-election for Anwar’s return.

It remains unclear which Member of Parliament will make way for Anwar, though the most obvious choice seems to be his wife, Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, who has always been a reluctant politician.

But Dr Wan Azizah giving up anything more than the PKR presidency for her husband could change the political dynamic of the ruling coalition.

Vacating her seat as Pandan MP would also make her lose the Deputy Prime Minister post.

This could lead to a Cabinet reshuffle or Anwar returning to the Cabinet to assume the post under Dr Mahathir's leadership, which would signal a return to the same pairing that governed the country between 1993 and 1998 before their spectacular fallout. That fallout had sparked the "Reformasi" movement that led to the formation of PKR in 1999.

This naturally would be the most logical path in Anwar's ascension to the most coveted seat in Putrajaya — being DPM will make him first in line for the job if and when Dr Mahathir chooses to resign as Prime Minister.

Oh said that Anwar "should" position himself as DPM before the scheduled takeover.

Anwar becoming DPM could also end speculations or any possible tensions within certain factions on PKR regarding Azmin's growing influence in the Cabinet.

However, the jostling for other positions under him, especially the deputy president's race between Azmin and former Pandan MP Rafizi Ramli, would inevitably cause fireworks, as PKR elections are a long drawn out process that lasts around two months.

Given how past PKR elections had been marred by chaotic scenes, the handling and conduct of members in this election, the first for PKR as a ruling party, will reflect directly on Anwar's leadership.

After the PKR elections and two impending by-elections are over, Anwar can then start planning his return to Parliament.

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