

## **Anwar: No regret joining Umno after leaving Abim**

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PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim today confessed that he never regretted joining Umno about 30 years ago.

"I have no regrets over my decision to join Umno. It was a maturing experience for me," he said in a speech at a forum on the history of the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (Abim).

He said this in response to prior speeches by two former presidents of NGOs, who claimed that Anwar's departure to join Umno put Abim in a difficult position.

The politician was a firebrand Abim leader who was tipped to join Islamic party PAS only to shock observers by joining the ranks of then Umno president Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the early 1980s.

Certain political quarters still see the opposition leader's departure from Abim as a betrayal of one of the pioneering and most influential organisation of the Islamist movement at the time.

Addressing around 1,000 Abim members at Universiti Selangor (Unisel) in Shah Alam, Anwar said that his move to join Umno had inadvertently also led to the maturity of other Islamic NGOs like Abim.

"Some people felt that Abim would close shop without Anwar," he said, adding that the assumption was proven untrue as seen by the organisation celebrating its 40th anniversary this year.

He said among his colleagues in Abim was former PAS president, the late Fadzil Noor, who was also among those who could not accept Anwar joining Umno, although they remained good friends.

Defensively, the opposition leader said that he had joined Umno in 1982 not to "further perpetuate the culture of slander, oppression and corruption" but to inculcate Islamic values in governance.

### **Anwar's departure a bitter pill**

Relating his early experience in the Malay-based party, Anwar claimed that his presence at usrah (discussion) sessions after dawn prayers and qiamullail (night prayers) had stirred discomfort among some of Umno members.

"These people saw it as a move to change Umno's directions," he said, not mentioning names.

Prior to Anwar's speech, Abim's second president Siddiq Fadzil who had helmed the position when the politician left Abim, said that the latter's decision to do so was a "bitter" experience for the NGO.

"If I was young and in search of riches, I would have thrown a fit and run away," he said drawing laughter from the audience.

Siddiq also raised pointed issues about Anwar's departure, leaving the former deputy premier looking sheepish on stage.

"He left to become finance minister, and what did he give to us? Of course, he was busy, contesting for the youth chief's post despite being new in the party," he quipped.