

In Bayan Baru, Anwar faces recurrent dilemma
MalaysiaKini.com
March 9, 2012
Terence Netto

COMMENT On the fourth anniversary of the electoral tsunami of which he was the chief maker, the politician Anwar Ibrahim last night returned to the scene that had yielded his party its most sweeping triumph only to face a dilemma the philosopher in him would have to face.

Anwar had let on to a large dinner-paying crowd and scores of bystanders in Bayan Baru in the south-east corner of the island of Penang that he had spent his time reading philosophy in the six years he had been in prison as a result of his first trial for sodomy.

What he didn't tell his audience is how the philosopher in him proposed to overcome what the politician in him has constantly to tackle: to face lurking triumph and disaster and treat those two imposters just the same.

On March 8, 2008, mixed-raced Bayan Baru had provided PKR with its most complete electoral triumph, gaining it the parliamentary constituency and all three constituent state wards, the only sweep of its kind for an opposition party in a seismic general election.

But within two years, that triumph, as the poet Rudyard Kipling had imagined, had morphed into near disaster, the pinnacle transformed into a precipice.

csis washing dc seminar zahrain hashim 180310MP Zahrain Mohd Hashim (right) crossed the floor in early 2010 to become a BN-supporting independent, a move that triggered a series of walkouts from PKR, reducing it from the opposition Pakatan Rakyat's most potent component to its most precarious.

Fortunately, the Zahrain-inspired walkouts stopped short of a stampede that would have seen the Anwar-led Pakatan erode its historic achievement carved out of the 2008 election: denial of incumbents BN of its customary two-thirds majority in Parliament.

'The rubbish we don't want, you pick up'

Last night, Anwar penitently clasped his palms around the microphone, bowed his head in obeisance to the crowd and apologised for the mistake he had made in choosing Zahrain.

The reigning impresario of the 13th general election's circuit was in his element.

"We were short of candidates for the last election," offered the PKR supremo contritely, as explanation to supporters who had come to commemorate the sweep of four years back.

What he didn't tell them was that he had been warned about the flakiness of Zahrain whom he had chosen not only as Bayan Baru candidate but also Penang PKR chief.

parliament pkr pc on royal immunity 021208 anwar tian chua zahrain Against internal party advice, Anwar went ahead and picked Zahrain, offering wags in Penang Umno from which long-standing member Zahrain had defected to PKR, the pleasure of a derisive quip: "The rubbish we don't want, you pick up."

Speeches at celebratory dinners cannot be expected to go into the minutiae of candidate selection or else Anwar would have had also to tell his audience about how he had led a party team to see the father of one PKR prospective candidate to sue for the man's permission to field the son.

The elderly man, a potentate in Penang politics in days gone by, had cautioned Anwar, in full view of the accompanying delegation, against choosing his son on account of the latter's dissolute ways.

The candidate went on to win the seat in which he was fielded, only to join in Zahrain's repudiation of PKR two years later, his wastrel ways the reason for the move rather than any ideological shift.

Brimming with infusion of fresh talent

However, the party supporting crowd last night wasn't particularly interested in past mistakes in candidate selection so much as future prospects. Anwar knew that and he offered them reassurances aplenty.

He said the party's candidate selections for the approaching 13th general election would be based on individual capability, commitment and integrity.

He hinted that where the choice had been strained the last time because few had expected his party to fare well, the slate is brimming now with the infusion of fresh talent.

What was left unsaid was how the philosopher in Anwar would resolve the dilemma posed by weak but loyal candidates the last time against the claims of seemingly more capable new ones - albeit of yet unproven fidelity - who recently have come to the fore.

This dilemma is exemplified by the tussle over candidate choice in a state seat in Bayan Baru whose current holder's performance has long caused high anxiety to the PKR state hierarchy but who latterly has attempted to retrieve his flagging fortunes through new-found vigour.

In politics, the dice is always rolling such the PKR impresario would have to dig deep into his well-honed political instincts - not to mention his jail-nurtured philosophic ones - to prevent candidate selection this time from becoming the culpable farces of the future that some excusably tragic ones were in the past.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/191543>