

PM or not, Anwar Ibrahim has won
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COMMENT That Anwar Ibrahim would be adjudged the most consequential political leader of the second half century of the Malaysian nation's existence is not in doubt.

This would be true even if by midnight tomorrow he is not endorsed as prime minister of the country as a result of the outcome of the country's 13th general election.

NONEHis achievements will be deemed to be weighty even if the coalition he leads, Pakatan Rakyat, does not win a majority of the seats in Parliament at tomorrow's polls, the most pivotal in the nation's history and, by reason of it being the 13th in the series, the most unnervingly resonant.

This is because the race riots of May 13, 1969, continue to rattle in the attic of the nation's memory like cargo come loose in the hold of a freighter.

The ghosts of that incident and the aftermath it unveiled, in an initially good and, then, gone badly wrong social engineering scheme, desperately need to be exorcised from the nation's collective memory.

Otherwise this country will forever be pinned down by the twin obsessions of race and religion, with its society teetering permanently on the brink of multiple schisms.

Reinventing Malaysia

No Malaysian leader has demonstrated more capability at possible attainment of that release than Anwar because of his skill at challenging and re-shaping the assumptions of the people he proposes to lead.

When he re-emerged on the national scene in 2007 to lead the opposition to continued rule by BN, after the shipwreck of a six-year stay in prison on trumped-on charges and a brief spell in the grooves of academe, Malaysian politics was firmly stuck in the quagmire of race and religion, a bog 50 years in the making and seemingly unyielding to nostrums.

By dint of being the principal adhesive in an ideologically disparate opposition that grouped a theocratic PAS and a secular DAP, with his own PKR holding the balance,

he was able to lead the coalition - with an assist from the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) - to a historic denial to the ruling BN of its vaunted two-thirds parliamentary majority in the general election of March 2008.

That in itself was a tremendous achievement.

NONE Given that previous electoral pacts between the exclusively Muslim PAS and the Chinese-dominant DAP did not amount to government-buffeting proportions or had unravelled soon after the polls, the fact that the Pakatan has endured now for five years makes his welding together of it a tour de force.

These are stupendous achievements, ones that eluded past protagonists of anti-Umno/BN coalitions, Onn Jaafar and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, who dented but could not dislodge the ruling powers, now over a half-century in harness, a span that's formidably difficult to end because of the enormous advantages conferred by incumbency.

That Anwar has been able to lead and sustain a coalition while simultaneously fending off a campaign, partly played out in the courts, of sustained vilification of his moral character was evidence of admirable reserves of moral fibre and resilience.

Massive crowds

The huge crowds that have turned out to hear him since Parliament dissolved on April 3 have been bigger and more responsive than the ones that showed up at his campaign appearances in the lead-up to GE12 in 2008.

Those crowds had paved the way for an unprecedented denial to BN of its traditional two-thirds majority in Parliament.

These days the crowds' magnitude presages the downfall of the BN government, the reason for caretaker Prime Minister and BN chief Najib Abdul Razak's vacuous optimism that his coalition would regain its two-thirds majority being interpreted as cover for electoral fraud on a massive scale.

That move would be foolish, given the size and mood of the crowds that have turned up at Pakatan rallies in several cities and towns in the residential hubs of the country.

kl112 rally people's uprising anwar ibrahim crowd story Mainly, the people have come to hear and see the Pied Piper of Malaysian political reform, to look at how he

has held up under the barrage of vituperation and character assassination.

No leader in modern times, in this and other countries, has been subjected to such a sustained and intense bout of personal vilification.

Throughout it all, Anwar composed himself before countless audiences in such manner as to steadily stay on the issues of national concern, telling his listeners how these have been grossly mishandled by Umno-BN.

Aided by a potentially disastrous decision by Najib to defer the polls on the assumption that a new-broom PM would recover lost ground through handouts and cosmetic changes to policies, Anwar used the time thereby extended him and the Pakatan leadership cohort to hammer away at the massive corruption and colossal waste of the country's resources by over a half-century of BN rule.

Revelations from a serial run of scandals affecting the government was of great help to making the point that Umno-BN was diseased beyond redemption.

Alternative media

The Pakatan message would not have gotten through widely enough without the connectivity of the alternative media, the mainstream one having been rendered a joke by its sickeningly supine attitude to its masters and owners.

The consequence of this widely disseminated message is the spectacle of the return in droves from such places as Singapore and nearby countries of otherwise indifferent Malaysian voters resident in those places who are keen to give the Pakatan plea for urgent reform of a decayed and dysfunctional system a chance to be realised.

bersih rally petaling street 090711These returnees and their local counterparts should help make the voter turnout at GE13 a peak - far more than the previous highest of 72 percent of the electorate - unmatched before.

Needless to say, a huge turnout would be a big fillip to Anwar's anticipated arrival at a personal summit: the fulfillment of a youthful ambition to be prime minister.

If the good life is a dream of youth realised in maturity, the great one must be the confluence between the fulfillment of a personal goal with the attainment of a national purpose which, in Anwar's view, is the salvation of Malaysia from Umno-BN's depredations.

Even without this fusion, his career has been a consequential one. With it, it would be a great one.

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