

Anwar, Putrajaya launchpad is not in Selangor

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Sometimes even with the purest intentions, we make things worse when we do our best to make things better. - Gregory David Roberts

COMMENT I for one do not have the liberty to tell you what Anwar Ibrahim's intentions are, noble or otherwise. It would probably take a political animal who is more seasoned than Anwar, such as former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, to pick what is in Anwar's brains at the moment.

Whether he is coming in to "save" Selangor from worse things to come (be it infighting or purported racial tensions) or use a possible menteri besar portfolio as a testimonial for his prime minister ambition a few years down the road, yesterday's decision of Anwar and PKR seems to be shrouded in such self-indulgence that you tend to wonder whether they are looking at a "bigger picture".

While his party members ask the rakyat to look at the "bigger picture" to understand the wisdom behind Anwar's decision to contest a state seat, it would be difficult to understand the wisdom behind a man and his party who are keeping their cards so close to their chest that they can't tell the people of Selangor if they would still have the menteri besar they overwhelmingly voted for in May 2013.

In the several intense arguments that Anwar's comrades have presented to the people, one of the most prominent points is their insistence that Anwar's foray into Selangor would be used as a "launchpad" or a "game changer" in Pakatan Rakyat's Putrajaya quest.

Pakatan, like BN, seems to be muddled with the sense that Selangor is the key to winning federal power. But the problem here is that Pakatan is so focused on Selangor that the rest of the country can almost feel abandoned or insulted.

With all due respect, the Putrajaya launchpad is not in Selangor. Pakatan won 44 of 56 state assembly seats, and also won 17 out of the 22 parliamentary seats in the state. Pakatan won Selangor, won popular votes and won three states. Yet, Putrajaya was nowhere near Pakatan's sights on May 5.

The reasons are plainly obvious: the coalition failed to secure the rural vote,

especially in East Malaysia, where the number of parliamentary seats to be won negates the impact of winning popular votes.

Too absorbed with infighting

That's where Pakatan's launchpad or game changer is. Sadly, eight months after the general election, the loose coalition is too absorbed with infighting and settling internal party affairs so that there was hardly any unified foray into the areas it had failed to obtain votes.

Even if Anwar models Selangor into a prime state par excellence, with great resources, flawless roads and ably functioning local councils, there is no guarantee that this will win him and his coalition enough votes nationwide to push them to take over Putrajaya.

If years of trumpeting (some of them quite rightly) about Abdul Khalid Ibrahim's financial management of the Selangor cash cow and Lim Guan Eng's people skills in Penang still did not get the rest of the states in Malaysia rush to the polls to vote for a Pakatan government, what difference will an Anwar-led Selangor success story make?

Not to forget, Khalid did not do a bad job in managing state, even though the question of whether he was excellent would be up to public interpretation. If Anwar chooses to take over as menteri besar from Khalid, he would be attempting to better a very tough act.

With such high financial benchmarks already set in the state, would it bode well for a former deputy prime minister as well as former finance minister to perform anyway less than twice as good as Khalid?

After all, with the expenses incurred through a deliberately orchestrated by-election, Anwar had better prove that he is worth the trouble.

What would then happen to the Pakatan MPs who constantly argue that Anwar is so good that the last time the country had a budget surplus was when Anwar was finance minister?

Khalid more popular with Selangorians

For all of their calculated tactical moves, PKR seems to have forgotten that Khalid is a popular figure among Selangorians, at least based on the elections and public opinion polls on his first term as menteri besar.

In fact, a study I came across days before the last general election showed Anwar to be much less popular than Khalid in Selangor - meaning there are those who approve of Khalid but not Anwar.

Khalid's tenure was not incident-free (even if there was no unpopular event, the BN opposition in Selangor often tried hard to ensure there are some controversies or issues) - ranging from water disputes to the hot-cold Talamgate.

However, personal attacks were never a chink in Khalid's armour. Detractors find it hard-pressed to raise anything controversial about him: there were no personal scandals, no corruption scandals, no lavish mansions, no accounts stocked elsewhere.

If anything, many of the attacks against his administration were policy-based, even if a number of them came from within his own party ranks.

On the other hand, Anwar comes with his own set of detractors who would rather go blind rather than admit that something, or anything, about him is good. For them, he can do no right.

Will personal scandals come to haunt?

Past controversies, personal scandals and vile posters will haunt his administration, which will also need to deal with personal attacks rather than policy-based rebuttals. Whether this will be fair to the rakyat of Selangor is something for Anwar himself to consider.

There are no doubts here that Anwar is embarking on a major, risky operation. A gambler can be a genius on the roulette table, but he can lose everything he has the very next second.

It could be that Anwar's intentions simply are to save Selangor before infighting ruins the running of the state - but as I have said, the purest of intentions can still make a situation worse.

Instead of being a saviour for Selangor, Anwar's entry into the state politics can bring about a completely opposite impact.

And mostly importantly, will Anwar, should he take over as the menteri besar of Selangor, find the time to venture into territories where Pakatan's reach is weak before the next general election comes calling?

If he doesn't, PKR and its allies are doing a good job of maintaining the rural-urban stalemate that prevented a federal government change in GE13.

And now, BN's years of drumming that Pakatan does not have enough unity or willpower to govern Putrajaya suddenly sound like words of wisdom.

And, as a friend of mine asked, "So, what will they do in the future if there is infighting for the post of prime minister? Call for a new general election after six months?"

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