

Anwar 'the great' conjures up a Catch-22

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COMMENT Even the most accomplished mathematician would be hard-pressed to tabulate the number of times this political magician has pulled a rabbit out of his hat, especially after his unceremonious exit from the corridors of power almost two decades ago.

And now, in the words of his supposedly most loyal sidekick, Anwar 'the great' Ibrahim has conjured another "world class" trick. The grand spectacle is scheduled to unravel in Kajang, and the climax, according to its inner circle craftsmen, would be in Putrajaya.

For this, said the sidekick, the people of the humble town of Kajang, whose only claim to fame thus far had been skewered meat and a prison, must be "grateful".

But Anwar's latest move has shoved Pakatan Rakyat supporters into a Catch-22 situation. And this is downright frustrating for them.

On that note, even former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad must be feeling a tad nauseated with Anwar contesting the seat, since it is located close to his lavish residence in Country Heights.

Forcing a by-election to allow Anwar to enter into the state arena has been met with intense criticism, even from his and the opposition bloc's diehard apologists.

What more when Anwar keeps insisting that he does not want to become Selangor menteri besar and that there is no plan to oust the incumbent, Abdul Khalid Ibrahim.

Allies too caught by surprise

The opposition leader's bolt from the blue had also caught PKR's allies by surprise and its leaders were obviously vexed, as exhibited in their delayed endorsement of the plan. This does not bode well for a coalition that never tires of boasting that its decisions are based on consensus.

Both in the real and virtual worlds, supporters and political observers scrambled to offer their views on the matter.

Coffee shop post-mortem of this latest imbroglio went in circles, unable to detect the cause(s) because there were too many possibilities and players involved.

However, many agreed that Anwar and the opposition have pushed the envelope too far this time and must be taught a lesson.

Even the Bersih chairpersons, both past and present, criticised the move, thus forcing Anwar's camp to embark on a damage control mission.

Rivals, on the other hand, wasted little time in pointing out Pakatan's contradiction in abusing the democratic process for its own agenda and at the same time crying foul over such abuses if it involved the ruling coalition.

Unimaginable for Anwar to lose

So, has Anwar shot himself in the foot this time? From a superficial viewpoint, it would appear so.

But taking into account that the opposition leader is a master politician and strategist, it is difficult to dismiss the current development as a miscalculation on his part, and one with the potential of backfiring.

As one Facebook posting says, "It's amazing how everyone with access to FB considers him/herself a seasoned political expert, the latest being their respective takes on the Azmin-Khalid-Anwar-Kajang saga. The fact remains that 99.9999 percent of these commentators know jack about the complexities of the entire issue. Me included."

"For sure, DSAI (Anwar) and PKR are imperfect, and yes, taking the voters of Kajang for granted is just plain wrong. But let's exercise a little patience before taking PKR and DSAI to the cleaners, as the full story is still under wraps from what I gather."

Similarly, it is even unimaginable that Anwar could lose the seat despite even supporters calling on voters not to back him.

But the fact is, Pakatan supporters are caught in a bind.

Should Anwar lose in the by-election, it would deal a devastating blow to his stature and serve as an impediment for the opposition's conquer-the-administrative-capital campaign.

Imagine a scenario where the supreme leader of almost demigod status fails in his attempt to defend a seat captured by a relatively unknown candidate from his party in the previous election?

BN would exploit the outcome, painting the voters' choice in that mixed constituency as a micro reflection of a more prevalent macro sentiment against Pakatan and Anwar.

It would also be viewed as the people's rejection of the plan to remove Khalid as menteri besar over internal political differences.

But should Anwar win simply because the majority of voters cannot stomach the notion of casting their ballots for a BN candidate, it would mean that Anwar and the opposition have carte blanche to use and abuse their mandates.

So as long as there is an overwhelming disdain for BN, which is considered the greater evil, the opposition will be able to escape unscathed with its transgressions.

However, frustrated voters might even choose to throw their lot behind a third candidate, and thus pave the way for a dark horse to win the Kajang race.

And based on preliminary assessments, the by-election is shaping up to be a ring for numerous gladiators with a slew of agendas, such as capitalising on the forced by-election dissatisfaction, BN's corruption and even matters related to race and religion.

Perhaps the people of Kajang should be grateful after all... For there might be a royal political rumble in their town.

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