

Renaissance man reinvents himself
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Tell-tale signs of cracks between then prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Anwar Ibrahim, could be seen in the 90s, where in less than a decade, his protege's influence grew tremendously and became deputy prime minister as well as deputy president of Umno. MCPX

His meteoric rise indeed put pressure on the leadership of Mahathir, with supporters hailing Anwar as his apparent successor, of which it was intolerable.

old photos of anwar ibrahim 260808 03From then on, Mahathir sought to undermine Anwar's power and influence, culminating in his successful effort in dismantling the Anwar-backed Wawasan team of Umno vice-presidents comprising Najib Razak, Muhyiddin Yassin and Muhd Muhammad Taib. (Abdullah Ahmad Badawi belonged to neither of the camps, and was ousted as vice-president by the Wawasan team in the 1993 party elections).

However in 1996, Abdullah returned to the Umno echelon as a vice-president with the blessings of Mahathir, while Muhyiddin lost his position at the party polls. Anwar's position was very much shaken, culminating in his dismissal in 1998 and the appointment of Abdullah as Mahathir's deputy.

Though there exists a crack in the nation's leadership in the 90s, Anwar took the opportunity to expand his horizon through his many overseas visits as a national leader, resulting in the further development of his ideals - instead of pushing forward reforms based on Islamic values, it would be based on universal values.

anwar ibrahim the asian renaissance 190808Such a change in ideals can be gleaned from Anwar's seminal work on 'The Asian Renaissance' in 1997. In witnessing the rise of Asia in its economic growth, Anwar believed that the new world order should be based on the foundation of multiculturalism, and not ethnic affirmative action at the expense of infringing and neglecting the rights of others, reminding that Malaysia is in essence a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural entity.

If the 1980s characterised Anwar's passion in Islamic reforms, the 1990s could be characterised as Anwar's attempt at merging Islamic and Oriental thought, bridging the age-old animosity between the East and the West.

In this period, Anwar showed forth his vision for the nation from an international perspective rather than from a religious perspective.

It should be noted that after Tunku Abdul Rahman and Mahathir, Anwar was the next Malaysian leader in articulating his thought through the publication of his seminal work. However, it was Mahathir who held the most number of published works, while Anwar was known more not by his ideas, but his tumultuous political career.

In Anwar's seminal work, he made special mention of Mahathir and his patience in giving him the freedom and space to explore and develop his ideas.

Fall from power

Anwar's reforms came to an abrupt halt when in 1998, Mahathir took the step to strip him of all leadership position, reducing him to nothing.

At this time, Anwar realised that reforms would not be successful from within, and that he needed to take more drastic measures to effect permanent change. Thus the launching of the reformasi movement, accompanied by Anwar's Permatang Pauh and Kuala Lumpur declarations.

However, Anwar had to face the wrath of the law, being detained without bail, and the subsequent charges leveled against him caught the attention of the international community. His political struggle on the streets was subsequently turned into a battle in the courts.

Yet the movement continued on and caught traction in the 1999 general election, with PAS the biggest winner. But the opposition faced one of their biggest defeats in the 2004 general election, with the Islamic party's representation greatly slashed, while PKR was almost uprooted from national politics.

This was due in no small part that Anwar's ideals were still unacceptable to the masses, with the opposition still unable to see the advantage of such ideals.

It was only after Anwar's release in 2004 that he had the opportunity to persuade PAS to turn aside their religious struggle, and instead fight for the welfare of all Malaysians. It was an arduous endeavour, taking three long years to convince PAS' rank to see the nation's political struggle through the lens of an Asian perspective.

anwar ibrahim bio chart updated 260808With this, PAS was able to make inroad into the 2008 general election, to the point that it was able to assume the administration of Perak and formed a coalition government in Selangor. Such a drastic turnabout demonstrated the leadership and charisma of Anwar in influencing a staunch political party such as PAS.

The 2008 general election was the greatest opportunity for Anwar to pave the way for him to re-enter national politics, and in the process, his vision and ideals of reforms were this time widely accepted, benefitting not only DAP, but also elevated PKR to become the leader in the national opposition bloc.

However, the only way that his vision and ideals be realised is by wresting national administration from the current government, knowing well that this journey will be harsh and gruelling, with failure a dreadful fate. The survival of Anwar thus far is in no small part due to his wife, Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, who for the past decade held the fort and paved the way for him to return.

Since ending his American lecturing circuit in 2006, Anwar had firmly established his visions, setting aside the agenda of Islamic reforms, though his image still portray a picture of an internationally-recognised moderate Islamic leader.

In enlarging his vision, Anwar had sought to rebuild the relationship with Turkey, and ready to embark again the struggle of his forerunner, Onn Jaafar.

At the same time, Anwar remained close with Saudi Arabia, recognising Malaysian Muslims' root to the Sunni denomination and the state as the pilgrimage centre of Islam. On the

other hand, his dream to initiate the Asian renaissance in Malaysia persists on, waiting for its day.

And thus, Anwar chose to contest in the Permatang Pauh by-election yesterday. As expected, he emerged the winner. The nation now awaits Anwar's next chapter in his tumultuous political career.

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