

Anwar's spirit reigns
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Having recently survived an operation and then a bout of pneumonia, I've failed to come up with a column in six of the past ten weeks. Not that

Malaysiakini's management complained about this dereliction of duty, or have others criticised or even noticed my absences.

Nurul izzah history 300307 nelson mandelaBut I'm extremely disappointed at myself for falling so short of my own expectations, and of the standards set by some of the political figures I most admire.

Nelson Mandela, emerging from 27 years in jail had enough fire in his belly and forgiveness in his heart to unite his Apartheid-torn nation to become its first indigenous president. He today still persists as a critic of corruption and other evils he sees besetting the ANC Party.

Or Mr J B Jeyaretnam, who apparently achieved nothing but alienation, vilification and bankruptcy in his decades of his dauntless and often virtually single-handed opposition to the PAP's strangle-hold over Singapore.

And then there's our Anwar Ibrahim. A classic example, if ever there was one, of the truth of some of the maxims I'd like to kid myself I have the courage to live by: 'Never say die', 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going' and 'What doesn't kill you makes you stronger'.

Lying in my sick-bed and feeling too sorry for myself, I started thinking how spectacularly Anwar puts me to shame. What have I done since 1998 to help my family and friends in Malaysia free themselves from the curse of the Barisan Nasional? Written a few dozen critical columns, then recently found myself too out of sorts to write some more.

anwar thanks voter speech at samagagah 300808.jpgMeanwhile, in the same 10-year time-frame, Anwar's defied Mahathir, fired-up the Reformasi movement, got beaten blue-black, locked-up for years in solitary, reinvented himself as an academic, formed a political party, helped forge the Pakatan Rakyat coalition, got hit with another trumped-up morality charge, addressed countless ceramahs, won a by-election by a landslide and taken his place as leader of the Malaysian opposition.

What a guy! What a survivor, striver and inspiration to us all. No, I'm not an Anwarista, to use the term my blogger buddy Ktemoc employs to scorn those he sees as unquestioning idolisers of Anwar. Nor do I see him as Malaysia's political messiah or some kind of cult personality.

Self-styled messiahs, like Mugabe or Mahathir have a way of mightily messing things up. And cult personalities like Mao Tse Tung have a supreme way of turning into 'poisonalities'.

As big an ego as he surely must have to survive all the trials and tribulations he's been through, I don't see Anwar as a megalomaniac. More as a symbol of dissent and a catalyst for change; a man on a mission to demonstrate to the rakyat that reformasi is achievable despite the odds BN has stacked against it.

Firebrand Gandhi

mahatma gandhi Or to put it another way, I see Anwar as a more a firebrand Gandhi-style figurehead than the Machiavellian political plotter that many opponents perceive him to be.

In all his spellbinding speeches he largely talks about not what he proposes as an individual, but his vision for the nation's institutions. The very institutions that, once restored after decades of degradation by BN, would be the peoples' best protection against relics of past Mahathirism or potential future Anwarism.

As he said himself the other day – and I believe he meant it – he may never become prime minister of Malaysia, as that will be up to his party and its partners in Pakatan.

But he'll certainly go down in history as the man who, more than anyone else, empowered, inspired and gave new hope to today's generation of opposition candidates, voters, activists and bloggers.

Not to diminish other 'never say die' opposition figures like Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh. But only a Malay Muslim like Anwar could effectively cross the racial divide that Umno so flagrantly fosters, just as only a Malay Muslim like Raja Petra Kamarudin could achieve a similar supreme feat in the bloggosphere.

Nor could Anwar have achieved all he has without what to me is the most telling factor in his favour, his wife, Wan Azizahwan azizah interview about her resignation as mp for permatang pauh 010808 03. What an amazing woman she is: doctor, mother, first female leader of Malaysia's parliamentary opposition.

Would a person of Wan Azizah's quality stayed with and supported Anwar if he'd been even half as evil a character as he's been portrayed? I don't think so.

But nor do I think he's perfect. Anwar himself has admitted he's "no angel". But compared with so many of his corrupt and incompetent demonisers in Barisan Nasional, he's virtue personified.

He's also very much alive and kicking, despite blowhard Khairy Jamaludin's boast that BN would "bury" him in the Permatang Puah by-election.

Renegade MPs

Whether Anwar can now deliver on his promise to seize government with the aid of 30 renegade BN MPs by 16 September is still up in the air, however. And as far as I'm concerned there's no hurry.

I can hardly imagine that there are 30 Barisan Nasional politicians worthy of a place in the Pakatan ranks. In fact there's only one BN figure I can think of who I wish would take Anwar up on his invitation to switch, and that's another Ibrahim.

zaid ibrahim interview 140308 05Zaid Ibrahim is far too smart and principled to be stuck in the current dumb and sleazy government. As he said himself in a speech to the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions reported by Malaysiakini just a month or so

ago, his advocacy of judicial reforms and greater press freedom “has caused consternation to some elements within my own (Umno) party, to the point that I am accused of espousing opposition policies and thus I should resign.”

Will Zaid Ibrahim ever jump and join Pakatan? Can whole parties like Gerakan, PPP, MIC or MCA be persuaded to cross over? Now that I’m well and truly back in the land of the living, I’m dying to witness what Anwar and his allies can do to finally kill-off the deadly BN, or at least hasten its inevitable demise.

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