

**Anwar can be PM, but needs to tone down
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Prior to the March 8 general election, many had considered former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim to be a spent force. But the charismatic politician proved his critics wrong and is now back in the forefront albeit on the other side of the fence.

Although his popularity nosedived a little when he failed to make good on his promise to seize control of the federal government on Sept 16, many still believe that he will one day become prime minister.

One such person is sacked Umno member and former law minister Zaid Ibrahim.

While expressing this view at the Regional Outlook Forum in Singapore today, the prominent lawyer however also advised the opposition leader to change his "grandstanding ways".

"Anwar is someone I admire immensely for his courage and tenacity. He has been the cement holding together the parties of Pakatan Rakyat with their diverse political philosophies and varying political agendas.

"I believe he'll be prime minister one day. Certainly, he will continue to be the main player in Malaysian politics for many years to come," Zaid told his audience.

However, he warned that proclaiming dates of anticipated takeovers without the ability to follow through merely "distract and detract".

"Powerplays like that have undermined Pakatan Rakyat in a way that has been wholly unnecessary. Anwar should instead focus on getting Pakatan Rakyat together as an entity with one coherent vision for the country."

ISA detention?

Touching on the sodomy charge against Anwar, the former Umno leader said some are of the view that he would be incarcerated again, either through the courts or by executive detention order.

"I am not so sure. The public demands by some cabinet ministers for Anwar to volunteer a DNA sample at the time he was arrested and subsequently when charged suggests that there are doubts. Without a conviction, he cannot be incarcerated."

Zaid also noted that detaining the opposition stalwart under the Internal Security Act would not bode well for the incoming prime minister, Najib Abdul Razak.

He warned that it would invite serious repercussions both domestically and internationally at a time when economic and social conditions are in a mess.

"I would like to think that Najib appreciates that he has other options to win the support of the people in the next general election.

"Detaining Anwar under the ISA is an unnecessary risk and may well turn the tide completely against BN. Nonetheless, I cannot say with certainty that Anwar will not be detained. Such is the state of play in Malaysian politics."

Honeymoon is over for Pakatan

As for the opposition alliance, Zaid reminded Pakatan Rakyat that the honeymoon is over for the five state governments of Kelantan, Perak, Selangor, Perak and Kedah.

"The Pakatan Rakyat cannot assume that they are safely on the road to Putrajaya come 2012. It must ensure that it retains these states. One would have thought that given the results in March, this would be a given. This may however prove not to be the case.

"It is said that on March 8 last year, Malaysians went in search of a viable alternative. Pakatan Rakyat must show that it is that alternative."

Public infighting is not the way to go about that, Zaid noted, adding that this is what Pakatan has come to be identified with in recent days.

He said the alliance needs to build on its common identity and provide for a common platform on major issues.

"Member parties must go beyond issues like the implementation of Islamic criminal law and concentrate on delivering on their collective message of social justice and compassionate and fair governance.

"In this, PAS, with its Islam-centric philosophy has to work harder to fall in line with PKR and DAP whose ideologies are more closely aligned.

barisan rakyat pakatan rakyat pkr dap pas leaders"Whether the ulamas of PAS are able to make this concession will be a test not just of their own maturity but also of the cohesiveness of Pakatan Rakyat."

In short, he stressed, Pakatan must show itself to be a real alternative to the Barisan Nasional way of doing things.

To retain the states currently ruled by them, the alliance must offer more effective policies and initiatives when compared to those of BN, he said.

"It would not be sufficient for them to depend on the personality of their leaders. That may have been enough the first time round, but the voters expect more, and rightly so."

Describing Malaysians as a patient lot, Zaid warned opposition leaders not to take this for granted.

"It is here that the former Umno leader said Anwar could contribute immensely by toning down on his grandstanding ways.

"He has after all, the support of the rank and file of all the parties in Pakatan Rakyat, although not necessarily some of its leaders."

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