

# Petra survives the bad press

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Raja Petra Kamarudin made his name championing the reformasi cause in cyberspace. But he has fallen out big-time with Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and, more stunningly, has become quite chummy with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

By JOCELINE TAN

**R**AJA Petra Kamarudin has had an image makeover. He has dumped his Che Guevara-like beard for a clean-shaven look, his long hair has been replaced with a buzz-cut – what his barber called the No. 2; No. 1 is shaved even closer to the scalp – and the pipe was nowhere in sight.

Dressed in a grey print shirt and slacks, he looked every inch the middle-class resident of the gated community where he and his wife Marina Abdullah live in Sungai Buloh, Selangor.

“It was too hot with the long hair especially under a helmet,” he said.

The black beret was still around though and he kept it on throughout the interview.

Raja Petra is, of course, the man behind *malaysia-today.net*, one of the most established news portals on Malaysian politics and issues. But he made his name via an earlier portal, *freeanwar.com*, which as the name suggests was aimed at promoting Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim’s release.

The *freeanwar* site closed down when

Anwar was freed by the courts in September 2003. By then, Raja Petra, who had predicted Anwar’s release two weeks earlier, had launched *malaysia-today*.

Since then, he has gone from being an Anwar supporter to falling out big-time with Anwar and the Parti Keadilan Rakyat people.

“He has been attacking us and Anwar. That’s bad,” said Keadilan information chief Tian Chua.

Apparently the Keadilan leadership is still upset with Raja Petra for the stories he has spun about Anwar wanting to rejoin Umno, that Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi’s son-in-law Khairy Jamaluddin would arrange it and that Anwar would then vie to be Prime Minister with Khairy as his deputy.

“It’s all totally untrue, and it was very discrediting for Anwar. Anwar is staying put in Keadilan but for one whole year, we had a hard time explaining to our supporters,” said Chua.

Raja Petra had also claimed that Khairy wanted to be Prime Minister by 40, which those familiar with the technicalities of Umno politics would know is impossible but the



**Man of many labels:** Raja Petra has been called a maverick, loose canon, hired gun, ultra-liberal and he doesn’t give a hoot.

notion was so romantic that some people just wanted to believe it.

Last year, he caused a stir when he hosted a forum for Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to air his quarrel with Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Even though Raja Petra and Keadilan had gone their separate ways by then, party leaders fumed over the fact that Raja Petra would work with the man he had vilified more than anyone else in his websites.

Since then, he has been labelled a maverick, loose canon, opportunist and even hired gun.

Raja Petra is cool about all the name-calling. He has not survived all those years of living dangerously, including an ISA arrest, without strong nerves and a thick skin.

“I don’t care. I’m not a Keadilan member, what do I care what they say? They don’t pay me. It’s up to me what I want to do and they can say what they like,” he said.

Besides, as he pointed out, it is not as though he has been grovelling at Dr Mahathir’s feet. He had apparently lectured the former premier on press freedom and democracy.

“Our first meeting lasted two hours and he complained about the Government and how he was denied space in the media. I told him he was telling me what I had been saying all the time when he was the PM.

“He told me he had a dirty mouth and that

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# Controversy keeps portal going

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he could not keep it shut. I told him, that makes the two of us. We are two loose canons, well, maybe more like machine guns."

There is obviously a symbiotic thing going on there.

Dr Mahathir is a maestro at using the media and he sees Raja Petra's portal as a means to an end. Raja Petra, on his part, freely admits that Dr Mahathir's controversial image brings in the visitors to *malaysia-today*.

"It's like selling a product. Who's going to read *malaysia-today* if it's not controversial? I am not apologetic about it."

Raja Petra, 56, is no johnny-come-lately in politics.

His interest in politics began in the mid-1970s when he and Marina moved to Terengganu where they owned a noodle factory.

He was soon moving around in PAS circles there and got to know the party leaders so well that he performed his haj with PAS president Datuk Seri Hadi Awang.

He stood out with his mixed parentage (his father was Malay, his mother Welsh and his uncle the late Selangor Sultan) and most of all, his gregarious and garrulous nature.

He is not exactly an intellectual but he is certainly part of the Malaysian intelligentsia, someone who is interested in and thinks about issues. Whether or not one agrees with what he thinks is, of course, another matter.



**The old look:** Raja Petra complete with beard, long hair, beret and pipe.

He only started working with the Keadilan people when Anwar's trial began because, like many people, he was disgusted with the proceedings. The rest is history.

Raja Petra is known as Peter to his family, RPK to his political and web associates, and Pet in his SMSes.

But as one regular visitor to the site said: "Some of the stuff there, it's like the *The Da Vinci Code* book. Bits of facts here and there held together by fiction. But it's

alternative streams as a provider here to stay and have contributed significantly to the development of our system. The existence of these alternative streams is not a zero-sum game. The sooner we accept and embrace this, the sooner we can focus our educational agenda without being clouded by polemic, racial, religious, political or personal interests.

The timing for change is now. There is strong political will and support from the top leadership to see the agenda through. I would therefore like to appeal to all to come on board to make this national mission a success.

**See StarEducation**

For details on "cluster schools"

the introduction of fast track motion schemes for our teachers is not just for cluster schools but also for teachers across board. I have already spoken to Public Services Department on fast track promotions.

s for managing autonomy in cluster schools, I have therefore instructed the ministry's secretary-eral Datuk Dr Zulkurnain ang, who was formerly at Intan, take charge of this initiative.

our existing in-house training lity, Institut Aminuddin Baki will be upgraded. On the sical side, we will be spending 280mil to construct two new s (one in Nilai and the other in awak), while on the soft side will be introducing new courses which are in tandem with the

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