

One foot in the door

DESPITE A BAD BACK AND FATIGUE FROM TWO WEEKS OF CRISS-CROSSING THE NATION, PARTI KEADILAN RAKYAT (PKR) DE-FACTO LEADER AND FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI ANWAR IBRAHIM IS ALL SMILES, FOLLOWING THE ALTERNATIVE FRONT'S UNPRECEDENTED PERFORMANCE IN THE RECENT GENERAL ELECTION AND HIS IMPENDING RETURN TO ACTIVE POLITICS. HE TELLS R. NADESWARAN AND TERENCE FERNANDEZ OF THE CHALLENGES IN GOING INTO THE POLLS AND THE EVEN BIGGER TESTS AHEAD.

Nades: One of your biggest challenges was (prior to the elections) getting a cohesive team. You had three different parties with three different ideologies. How did you manage to unite and convince them on having straight fights?

Anwar: What's so different about Umno, MCA and MIC? Or PBB or PBS or PBDS. One talks about *ketuhanan Melayu*, one talks about Chinese survival, one wants Indian affairs resolved. It does not seem to be contentious as in practice they were able to show a cohesive stance.

Similarly within Keadilan, PAS and DAP. Other than what's perceived from outside ... look at the manner they conducted the election campaign, they were together and worked well. We have Chinese voting for PAS, Malays voting for DAP. The people have spoken. They said: "Look, we want a cohesive Opposition. Today, so-called contentious issues of the past, like the Islamic State and Hudud have not been resolved. It's neither the manifesto nor their agenda anymore."

Nades: How do you manage to get PAS to drop the Islamic State agenda which they had been so vociferous on in previous elections?

Anwar: I've convinced them and they also know my position ... if you want me to be involved, this is my position. Similarly with Keadilan and DAP. They must be seen to be multiracial and not questioning the position of Bahasa or the Malay position. You can adjust but the paramount interest of justice, catering to those who are poor and marginalised, covering all races must be realised. I think what was achieved last night (a meeting between PKR, DAP and PAS) is a very important beginning. We sat down and discussed for hours and looked at the issues and it was agreed that we must unite and make politically expedient decisions.

Terence: It seems that when you go into elections it is easy to have a common front. But like what happened in Perak shows that once you gain

power, it is a different story altogether.

Anwar: What happened in Perak is less problematic (than those) in Perlis and Terengganu (laughs). Because the media is controlled by them; that is why the focus is on Perak and Selangor.

But I don't deny that there are problems. Even within Keadilan, we have contending candidates, the DAP and PAS also have issues. But in the case of Perak, I understand the problem. PAS had the least number of seats so naturally, for DAP to take a tougher stance is quite understandable.

(But) Why does the media play up this huge issue? We took a position that was quite tough too - we support the MB; we support the administration but we refused to participate in the administration unless the spirit of cooperation is there.

I have enough problems in Penang with having eight non-Malays and two Malays. To have a similar arrangement in Perak would not be wise. It does not mean the Opposition is cracking up and to be fair to DAP, they made adjustments. And I have to record my appreciation.

That's in the past, now contrary to popular perception that the collaboration is merely prior to elections or prior to forming a government ... as of last night (March 18), we have now entered into this new arrangement. It will be a much more cohesive force as it will not be like the BN or PAS or DAP... here is the agenda, about constitutional guarantees, what about the Malaysian Economic Agenda, basic tolerance and the perceived dominance of one race against the others.

Terence: You needed this new resolution because you were ill-prepared for the aftermath of the elections where Barisan Rakyat took five states and Kuala Lumpur? You never expected the results.

Anwar: I was very confident that

we will take over the whole government. We crossed the one-third mark a long time ago.

Nades: Reading your comments in a Singapore interview, we said maybe Anwar is overconfident? Anwar is sounding cocky that he can form the government.

Anwar: The interview in Singapore was given after they cancelled the indelible ink and the reason they cancelled the ink was because we were edging towards that (winning the election). We had passed 48% of the popular vote. Edging about 2% a day of the shift; and they knew that. That's why they cancelled the indelible ink. Which means they had 5-4% votes to cheat. So imagine if they had used the ink? And the postal votes? We would have won easily.

Nades: Should the postal votes be abolished as we are not at war or in emergency. It was (mostly) meant for our servicemen in the jungles during the Emergency and the war against the communists.

Anwar: No. Postal voting can be conducted in a transparent and fair manner. These people ... they virtually have robbed the people of their votes.

Like in Setiawangsa (which was won by Datuk Seri Zulhasnan Rafique) ... we won. Then came 14,000 postal votes.

Terence: We cannot prove this but is there any truth that in Lembah Pantai, where your daughter Nurul Izzah was contesting (and won against Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil), there were similar attempts?

Anwar: Yes. But there was not enough to go around. In Teluk Kemang 7,000 postal votes were brought in, still our guys managed to win.

Which means the number supporting us is big. That's why I said, we will win if we get 55%. Even during the campaign I said you want to win with 50%, forget it!

Nades: How are you going to put your economic plan into action while dealing with the sensitive topic of the NEP?

Anwar: I drafted the MEA (Malaysian Economic Agenda) a year ago and gave a detailed explanation to civil servants about what we have planned for the poor and marginalised Malays, Chinese and Indians. We should start with regaining our competitiveness which we have lost, and attract more foreign direct investment. We have to build the economy upwards. With that in mind, then we can talk about distributive justice and equity.

Terence: It seems that only Umno is opposing the MEA while the other BN component parties are keeping mum.

You see, even in Umno there is disconnect between the thinking of the leaders and the grassroots.

I will be meeting division

leaders to explain this. I was portrayed negatively by *Utusan Malaysia*. They were demonising us, saying that we are traitors to the Malays.

That's interesting. "I am a traitor to the Malays". I have not taken one share, no taxi permit, no contract in the name of bumiputra and all those so-called champions of Malays have taken hundreds of taxi permits, APs and contracts by the hundreds of millions of ringgit.

So I said don't enter into this (argument) otherwise I will smash them hard. Don't use the racial card. If you say you are concerned about the NEP, it's okay we can argue, we can discuss this but don't start condemning us. I've appealed to them to stop this.

Reviewing the NEP is not just (DAP secretary-general and Penang Chief Minister) Lim Guan Eng's view; of course in my mind we should craft the words properly.

Coming from a Chinese they would immediately play the racial card.

It is unfair to Guan Eng, although I would have advised him not to touch on the NEP, but it was unfair to him because his words were taken out of context. He did say it was for the poor of all races.

Nades: Closer to Selangor, what changes can we expect from the new government?

Anwar: Firstly, it's governance. There was so much of wastage, corruption, leakages and alienation of land. According to the reports I have, hundreds of millions of ringgit are literally down the drain.

But we have to be careful. We cannot create the impression that we are going to dismantle everything, because we will lose investor confidence. People want

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