

# Why Anwar should have, been in Davos

The nationalist would have made a towering impact on the global economic platform.

IT could have been the perfect platform for Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim - the newly-elected Prime Minister of Malaysia making his debut on the world stage.

And knowing him, Anwar would have made a tremendous impact at the most watched, evaluated and debated platform in the free world - the World Economic Forum (WEF).

The WEF that ended on Jan 20 had assembled statesmen, titans of industry, civil society leaders, economists, futurists, thinkers, spies - 2,700 of them from at least 120 countries. The glitterati of the capitalist realm were all there. Unlike politically-laden sessions in the form of G7, Apec (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) and such groupings, this is a unique forum.

Mohd Herizal Hazri, former chief executive of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, believes that the world is lacking an internationalist as a head of state.

Anwar is seen as one - a natural bom reformist, an internationalist in deed yet rooted to his strong religious credentials, and very much a nationalist at heart.

The theme of the 53rd WEF was "Cooperation in a Fragmented World" - an apt one, considering What the world. has become of late. It was held with the backdrop of the chaos created by Russia in Ukraine, the debilitating effect of the two-year Covid-19 pandemic, nations struggling to balance inflation and growth, and the threat of climate-induced catastrophes.



**JOHAN  
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## Comment

WEF engages real global players. The discussions are open and frank and more importantly, free of diplomatic encumbrances.

It has a strong business community presence, a plus point for a leader of a trading nation like ours.

It is a golden opportunity to meet with the best and the brightest (some perhaps the most unscrupulous) in the business world.

Perhaps Anwar could have also learned a thing or two from his interactions. The Edelman Trust Barometer 2022 reveals that businesses and NGOs are more trusted than governments.

After all, corporate CEOs are believed to be the face of change. Why not marry them both - a credible leader known for integrity with the futuristic mind taking his nation to another level, just like any successful CEO.

Of course, there are detractors of WEF. Some argue that the glitzy exercise is now "out of touch". What relevance is Davos when economic heavyweights are playing by different rules?



**Shaping principles:** The 53rd annual World Economy Forum was themed "Cooperation in a Fragmented World: Addressing Pressing Crises, Tackling Future Challenges".  
- Bernama

Nations are building enclaves and demolishing the very idea of free trade to protect their own interests. In many ways, fervent nationalism is redefining many nations now. Populism is a catchword to mean leaders are better liked if they look inward rather than outward.

There has been criticism that Davos is a congregation of the rich talking about wealth and not much more. Environmental issues take centre stage simply because they have affected the wellbeing of nations and companies. The war in Ukraine affected many companies - at least 1,000 are now curtailing business with Russia, a lucrative market.

The deepening crevice between the rich and the poor is real. As pointed out by Oxfam, during the past two years, the richest 1% scooped up nearly twice as much new wealth as the rest of the world. It is not surprising. Some of the indi-

viduals attending WEF are richer than many nations of the world. The wealth divide is destabilising governments. Within nations, people are struggling to make ends meet. The cost of living is spiralling. Food safety is worrying. Basic food items are disappearing from shelves.

What good is Davos to Asean or more specifically Malaysia? International Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz, who represented Malaysia, promoted how business-friendly we are. He wanted participants to know that Malaysia is a quality investment destination.

Tengku Zafrul was reported to have participated in discussions on the cost of economic fragmentation, supply chain and transport. He was also a panellist in a session entitled "Living with Risk."

Anwar could have made an indelible mark in Davos. He is the man at

the helm now. He is by far the best-known leader from Asean. And he is still in touch with the bigwigs of the world stage.

It is true he was hardly 54 days in office when WEF began. And he has lots of issues at home.

But this is one platform made for someone like him. A platform that awaits no one. I was hoping he would be there to help set the agenda for the future, a tradition that we have lost due to incompetent and inward-looking leaders.

Anwar could have mesmerised this year's participants with his vision of the current and future world. He excels on such a stage.

He did that in New York in 1998 when he attended the Committee for Foreign Relations meeting. He was at the centre of the political storm back home. He knew he was to be fired or worse. But he gave a speech worthy of a standing ovation. He charmed them all.

He could have done the same in Davos. Imagine Anwar sharing his ideas as a leader representing a developing world, his version of progressive Islam and the challenges he is facing as leader of multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation. And a fragmented nation politically. It is a pity he didn't attend.

**Johan Jaaffar is a journalist. He was a journalist, editor and for some years chairman of a media company, and passionate about all things arts and literature. The view expressed here are entirely his own.**