

# A policy 40 years in the making

AN easy way to understand the Malaysia Madani policy framework is to look at Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's remarks on skyscrapers and mega projects.

Khairul Ariffin Munir, a scholar of the think tank behind the Malaysia Madani concept, says the prime minister has made it clear that he will not be building any more of these structures.

Instead, Anwar emphasises that he prioritises the ground on which they are built, says Khairul Ariffin, senior manager of Institut Darul Ehsan (IDE).

"Because if the ground is not good, then these structures will collapse. That is basically what happened with 1MBD," says Khairul Ariffin, referring to the 1Malaysia Development Berhad financial scandal.

Launched with great fanfare in 2009, 1MBD erupted into the world's largest kleptocracy scandal with US\$4.5bil (RM20.8bil at today's exchange rates) in funds stolen and siphoned off to buy hotels, high-end condos, jewellery and yachts in the United States and the United Kingdom.

The "ground" in the above analogy is Malaysian society itself, which Anwar wants to transform in a way that would prevent more 1MBDs from sprouting, says Khairul Ariffin.

In its place, Anwar wants to create a Malaysian society that

is based on six core values sustainability, care and compassion, respect, innovation, prosperity, and trust.

Anwar wrote a book to explain the importance of these values and how they link to his vision for Malaysia, which he called the "Madani" society, says Khairul Ariffin.

The English version of the book, *Developing a Madani Nation: Vision and Framework for Reformation Policy*, was completed and launched in October 2022, a full month before he went into the 15th General Election as a candidate for prime minister.

(IDE published both the English and Bahasa Malaysia versions of the book.)

The term Madani itself is neither new nor exotic, points out Khairul Ariffin.

"In 1996 Anwar had presented a paper on the Madani society at a seminar in Indonesia," he says:

Although its origin is Arabic, Madani was entered into the Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka's 2020 Bahasa Malaysia dictionary, where it is defined as: "In terms of thought, spirituality, and materialism ... the effort to shape Society by instilling pure values of familyhood; the curriculum also aims at community development (definition trans-

lated from Malay)."

The Madani policy framework is not just a slogan that Anwar launched to give his administration a different branding from the ones that came before, Khairul Ariffin adds.

"It is actually the culmination of his experiences, observations, and lessons learnt in his almost 40-year career in politics - from the time he was an activist in the 1970s to the time he was in Umno to his imprisonment and struggles leading the Opposition," says Khairul Ariffin.

In the "Acknowledgments" section of his book Anwar writes that the seeds of this framework and vision were first sown in his 1997 book *The Asian Renaissance*.

The nine years he spent in prison allowed him to read, reflect upon, refine his ideas and outline the foundation of this policy framework.

When he was released in 2018, he spent more than a year consulting with economists, strategists, political scientists, and legal experts to build upon that foundation and turn it into the policy that was launched in January 2023.

"I hope that with this framework, Malaysia as a nation with huge potential, is ready and able to face the challenges of the future," Anwar writes.