

Finding strength in 'Anwar' biopic

IT was a long and arduous journey for Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim before he became the 10th prime minister of Malaysia.

The 75-year-old statesman's perseverance in the midst of persecution has now been chronicled in a new biopic, *Anwar: The Untold Story*.

Set between 1993 and 1998, the film covers Anwar's days as finance minister and deputy prime minister, his sacking from the cabinet and jailing, as well as the birth of the *Reformasi* movement, which gave rise to Parti Keadilan Rakyat.

Just like his real-life struggles, the filmmaker and producers of the biopic also faced multiple challenges in order to realise the project.

Indonesian filmmaker Viva Westi lets on that some of the

challenges faced were having to film mostly in her home republic, getting the facts right and whether the film would be allowed to be screened in Malaysia.

"Several years ago, it seemed like many were 'allergic' to talking about Anwar and I wondered if we would ever be given the permission to screen the film in Malaysia.

"The scenes involving Bukit Aman (the Royal Malaysia Police headquarters) were also not very easy to do. I don't think I need to explain further since everyone knows.

"The most strenuous aspect was creating a film that illustrated a sympathetic person's struggle to do the right thing.

"It's just that it wasn't the ideal or perfect way to do it. By right, it should have been completely

filmed in Malaysia and populated by a cast of Malaysian talent.

"As it turned out, we had to film mostly in Jakarta, with all of the sets seen in the film, including Anwar's residence, built from the ground up," she says during the recent gala premiere of *Anwar: The Untold Story* in Dadi Cinema, Pavilion Kuala Lumpur.

Despite the challenges, the 50-year-old prolific film director added that she found the courage and confidence to undertake this project after meeting Anwar and his wife, DatukSeri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.

"I had thought a lot about whether I could be daring enough to do this as it was telling somewhat of a taboo story, which was not easy at all.

"But my strength came about each time I met Anwar and Wan Azizah. It was Anwar who gave me the courage to create this film," says Viva.



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