

**Jakarta still warm to Anwar despite Umno's fresh overtures**  
**Malaysian Insider**  
**July 18, 2012**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, July 18 — Despite Umno's recent move to rekindle ties with the Indonesian political elite, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's popularity remains high in Jakarta where he sat with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and other Asian leaders in a regional forum yesterday.

There, Anwar rubbed shoulders with Yudhoyono and most of his Cabinet ministers who turned up for the Strategic Review journal and the Strategic Review Forum launch. The journal is edited by former Indonesian foreign minister Hassan Wirajuda and backed by current trade minister Gita Wirjawan.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin had described Anwar's influence as on the wane during his own six-day visit to the republic earlier this month. During the visit, the Umno deputy president and his senior colleagues met leaders of three major parties — Golkar chairman Aburizal Bakrie, Democratic Party chairman Annas Urbaningrum and Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (DPI-P) chairman Megawati Sukarnoputeri.

He also had a meeting with Indonesian vice-president Boediono during his visit but not Yudhoyono, who is on his last term as president.

"They treated Anwar very respectfully. It's arguable that this (the public encounter) would not have happened had Muhyiddin and the Umno leaders not met with Ibu Megawati earlier in the month," an Asean political analyst told The Malaysian Insider.

Apart from Anwar, the others attending the inaugural forum on "Peace and Reconciliation in Southeast Asia" were former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra and former Timor Leste president Jose Ramos-Horta. According to the organisers, this is the first time that Thaksin will have given a public address in an Asean country since 2008.

Yudhoyono gave the keynote address at the forum and later launched the journal together with Wirajuda and Wirjawan.

The journal said it was created "to reflect the intellectual and policy fundamentals of Indonesia and its perceptions of the world at large. The journal offers insights into the world of great thinkers, policymakers and many more in Indonesia and abroad, and unique stories, essays and interviews about Asian and global affairs."

But Anwar's appearance soon after the Umno leaders' visit to boost ties and co-operation has set tongues wagging among the Indonesian elite, who have grown confident since their country became part of the Group of 20 (G20) major economies around the world. Indonesia is the only Asean member state in the group.

"On the one hand, it reflects a growing maturity in Malaysia-Indonesia relations; on the other, it represented a slap in the face for Najib Razak's administration. Indonesian elites are becoming increasingly aware of Najib's fragile hold on power and are willing to risk official Malaysian wrath.

"Indonesians are heading off in their own direction. Najib's sensitivities and Malaysian concerns are unimportant," said the analyst, who did not want to be named.

The former deputy prime minister has long had close ties with Indonesian politicians and liberally sprinkled words from Indonesia, which shares a common language with Malaysia, into Bahasa Malaysia when he was education and finance minister. Several of Anwar's supporters also fled to Indonesia after he was sacked on sodomy and corruption charges in 1998.

Ties between the two neighbours have been lukewarm over territorial, business and manpower issues. Indonesia is the largest supplier of labour to Malaysia but has reduced the number of house maids over the years over reports of ill-treatment and some deaths.

The latest controversy to erupt was Malaysia's proposal to recognise the "Tor-tor" dance and the beat of the "Gordan Sambilan" of the Mandailing community here, as part of the country's heritage.

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