

A DAP man tells how Malaysia's future "is tied to the BN"
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BY SHERIDAN MAHAVERA

By his own admission, Anthony Loke Siew Fook "ditakdirkan" to join the DAP.

"I started being interested in current affairs since I was in primary school," says the 36-year-old Seremban native who went to St Paul's primary and secondary schools.

His father was a DAP member, his nanny's husband was a member, while his other family members and neighbours were all supporters. A teenage Loke also looked on DAP veteran Lim Kit Siang as a hero.

This was more than two decades ago, when opposition parties and their members were considered eccentric.

"Next to my father's old shop in Temiang was a newspaper vendor. I remember squatting there everyday to read Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian and (the now defunct) Watan.

"That was at a time Utusan was critical and balanced," laughs Loke, saying his favourite sections were politics and sports.

"I always read the politics section first".

Except for a brief 18 months during which he and a few friends ventured unsuccessfully at an internet start-up, his post-university career has been with the DAP.

In fact, considering his school-age interest, his student activism and his years as a party staffer, state assemblyman and parliamentarian, Loke has been into politics for two-thirds of his life.

It could explain why through-out the interview Loke repeatedly steers the conversation towards politics on subjects, such as how he felt about Malaysia turning 50 and what aspect of the country upsets him.

But this isn't recycled Pakatan Rakyat ceramah rhetoric.

When talking about "Malaysia at 50", Loke stresses how we can't talk about a country and its people without looking at the system in which they have been managed.

In other words, if you want to talk about Malaysia, you still have to talk about its politics.

The Negeri Sembilan breakthrough

Loke is quite animated in talking about his years in the DAP. The Malaysian Insider pic by Najjua Zulkefli, September 7, 2013. Loke is quite animated in talking about his years in the DAP. The Malaysian Insider pic by Najjua Zulkefli, September 7, 2013. Loke's rise at a young age in national politics - he was 27 when he contested his first seat - follows other DAP luminaries such as Lee Lam Thye, Tan Kok Wai, Fong Poh Kuan and Lim himself.

Unlike many other parties, be it from Barisan Nasional or Pakatan Rakyat, the

above-mentioned DAP stars neither had wealth nor a dynastic name when they started out.

But what has made Loke stand out was his work in Negeri Sembilan where he helped the party re-establish its base after almost being decimated in the 1999 elections.

When Loke joined the party sometime in 2002 as a staffer for then secretary-general Kerk Kim Hock, the party he says, was going through a dark period.

Negeri Sembilan for instance, always had a DAP presence in the Seremban area. The party also always had representatives in Parliament and the State Assembly since the 1970s.

"But from 1996 till 2004, we had no wakil rakyat in Negeri Sembilan. My resolve when I joined was to make a breakthrough and recapture seats for the party.

"It was hard then. I was 25, no one knew me. The party was short of funds and resources. But we worked hard and I had a lot of help from party leaders."

In 2004, he contested the Lobak state assembly seat and beat the incumbent, who was a DAP-turned-MCA politician. This was a bad year for non-BN parties. PAS lost Terengganu and PKR lost all its seats save one.

The DAP slowly rebuilt its base in Negeri Sembilan after 2004. In the 13th general election, it won 11 seats in the 36-seat state assembly and two seats in the Dewan Rakyat.

Yet for all he's done, Loke still feels dispirited.

"I won in both the seats I contested (in 2013). But we were not empowered to make the changes we promised. We campaigned on a platform of new policies, new management. But the results didn't enable us to form a government."

It's all BN's fault

Loke is not interested in the process of wheeling-and-dealing, the rush of power and the idol-building of partisan politics.

For him, winning elections is just a means to get to a position whereby he can make a difference for the country.

Even as a wakil rakyat, it pains him that the ability to serve his constituents by speaking up for them and solving their local problems is being crippled, by what he describes as a vengeful state BN administration.

"The state government gives out aid for those who got into university. We've had students who told us that their applications were rejected because of the signatures of their ADUN (state assemblyperson) who were from Pakatan.

"The students were told to go and get a signature from a BN ADUN," says Loke.

Which goes back to what Loke is trying to impress upon throughout the interview – who really is in control of Malaysia and who really does shape the country's direction?

If Loke and the 10 other Pakatan wakil rakyat were chosen by their constituents, then should not the state administration, which was also chosen by that same system,

acknowledge and accept that?

If, as the conventional view goes, a country's direction is determined by its people, how come people like Loke are not running the country if 51% of the population voted for them last May?

This is the context in which Loke lays the country's problems (and its future) squarely at the feet of the BN.

"The BN think the country belongs to them. So that's why they penalise people who don't support them. It's a very immature mindset."

It is also what he wants to see change in the next five years if the country is to progress any further.

"The BN must come to terms that Pakatan is here to stay. That there will always be competition and that the people must be given the opportunity to choose. You cannot just penalise people.

"If BN does not change this mindset then the country will stagnate and not progress, and there will be more polarisation".

And what will Anthony Loke do in the face of such an obstinate administration and the possibility that this will not change?

"I will continue to be a check and balance to them," he says with a smile. - September 7, 2013.

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