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No challenge, Anwar says it again

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PENANG, Tues. - Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim today reiterated that he would not challenge party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in next year's party elections.

Anwar, who is also Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, said rumours that he would challenge Dr Mahathir were "baseless and illogical".

He said he had met leaders of all the 11 Umno divisions in Penang and they had supported his stand on the matter. To show their support to Dr Mahathir, the divisional leaders had also agreed to nominate Dr Mahathir for the presidency in next year's party polls.

Speaking at the opening of the RM35 million 21-storey Menara Umno, Anwar reminded the people of Dr Mahathir's advice that everyone should work together with Umno and the Barisan Nasional to face the economic problems.

"I wish to say, not only to Umno and the Malays, but to all the people in Penang that they stand firmly behind the Prime Minister and give him their support to overcome the problems," Anwar said.

Dr Mahathir, who spoke just after Anwar, thanked Anwar for voicing his support and that of all the 11 divisions.

"I hope you do not just nominate but also give your votes," he said in jest.

Anwar also touched on rumours and poison pen letters (on his relationship with Dr Mahathir). He said he had discussed the matter with all Umno leaders in Penang and they had agreed that if they were to listen to the rumours and believe the poison pen letters, they would cause problems to the party and the people.

"I want to show my loyalty and love to the Prime Minister. I have been in the party with Dr Mahathir for a long time. I am indebted to him personally and I am repeating my loyalty pledge to him," he said.

His remark was greeted with applause from the huge crowd which was made up of Umno leaders from national and State levels and other members.

On a lighter tone, Anwar, who is Penang Umno chief, said: "But don't forget me as the deputy."

He said the fact that he was loyal to Dr Mahathir was nothing new.

"The president knows this (about his expressing loyalty to the president) during the party's general assembly every year, but this did not stop the rumours."

Anwar, who is head of the Permatang Pauh Umno division, made it clear that sometimes there were differences in their views during meetings, but it was "impossible" to say that these differing views could cause a split.

He said he had meetings with Dr Mahathir almost every morning to discuss matters such as measures to tackle the economic problems.

"Dr Mahathir is not a new leader. He has vast experience. His style of politics is also extraordinary.

"Compared to him, I am a mere student. I know it is impossible to fight a teacher, what more a father.

"I wish to take this opportunity to quash any rumours (about challenging Dr Mahathir for the top post).

"If these rumours continue, they must originate from people who have bad intentions, who want to cause a fight and weaken the party and the country.

"May God give strength to us and even more to Dr Mahathir," he concluded.

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