

Anwar too hot to handle in Tenang?
Malaysiakini.com
January 4, 2011

Despite Johor's reputation as a BN stronghold, PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim's presence on the Tenang by-election campaign trail seems to have given the ruling coalition the jitters.

At two rallies in the constituency last night, the police moved in to stop the events the moment Anwar took the rostrum.

In contrast, the police ignored other Pakatan Rakyat leaders who spoke before Anwar.

Nor did the authorities act when PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang spoke at several functions a few days before.

"When other leaders spoke, there were no interruptions. But when Anwar spoke, the police would stop him almost immediately," said Johor PAS information chief Mazlan Aliman.

"Johor Umno is very worried about Anwar's because he was very influential here when he was deputy prime minister. There were Umno leaders and community leaders at the two ceramah last night."

At the first function at Kampung Ayer Panas, the road leading to the venue were lined up with police vehicles and roadblocks.

Eyewitnesses reported that the heavy police presence dissuaded many people, leaving only a small crowd of 300 people at the event.

Apco issue triggers action

When Anwar took the stage at about 9.45pm, the police promptly moved in and demanded that the ceramah be stopped. Anwar relented and moved on to the next function in Felda Cempelak.

The ceramah at Felda Cempelak attracted a far larger crowd of 3,000 people despite heavy police presence, backed by two water cannon trucks.

Anwar took the stage at around 10.45pm after other leaders including Johor PKR chief Chua Jui Meng (below), PKR Youth chief Shamsul Iskandar Mohd Akin and Mazlan had addressed the crowd.

Again, almost immediately after Anwar starting speaking, the police moved in to stop the ceramah.

Organisers failed to convince the police to allow Anwar to speak and the PA equipment was confiscated.

Unperturbed, Anwar continued with this speech using a loudhailer, leaving only those closer to the stage to be within audible range.

The police allowed the gathering to proceed until about 40 minutes later when Anwar denounced Apco Worldwide, an international firm hired by the Najib administration.

"We needed to prevent possible chaos so we ended the ceramah," said Mazlan, who is also PAS deputy campaign director for this by-election.

'Double standards'

It was learnt that the police had refused to grant permits for the two functions because the campaign period starts on Jan 22, as stipulated by the Election Commission (EC).

Mazlan maintained that Pakatan has the right to hold functions all year round.

"Holding a ceramah does not necessarily mean we are campaigning... We have the right to assemble. This has nothing to do with the EC," he said.

He said that the police clampdown last night was double standards because BN and Umno had been campaigning "blatantly" through government agencies and using public facilities such as community halls.

"Government agencies sent letter to residents asking them to attend events by BN and Umno leaders.

"If they want to tighten the enforcement, it should equally apply to BN and Umno but their programmes were not prohibited at all," he said.

Anwar will return to Tenang on Thursday to meet Chinese voters at a dinner function organised by PKR in Labis, a Chinese-majority rural township.

The by-election was called after the death of state assemblyperson Sulaiman Taha on Dec 17 last year.

The constituency, a traditional Umno stronghold, is located within the parliamentary constituency of Labis, now held by Deputy Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Minister Chua Tee Yong, from MCA.

Polling will take place on Jan 30.