

Police disrupt Anwar's ceramah again
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Police disrupted PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim's public ceramah for the third time in a row - this time the party's largest of such events held tonight in the stronghold of Sarawak deputy chief minister Alfred Jabu.

The dinner-cum-ceramah held in a open-air food court in Betong, a small town 70km north of Sri Aman, started smoothly with local PKR leaders, including four candidates, giving their speeches for over an hour without any interruption.

Anwar took the stage immediately upon arrival at 9.30pm, and was welcomed by a nearly 1,000 multiracial crowd chanting "Reformasi".

However, when he started to warm up the crowd after 10 minutes, a uniformed police personnel approached him and requested him to stop the speech, raising tensions in the crowd.

After a brief negotiation, Anwar agreed to shorten his speech.

He then managed to continue his fiery speech for another 20 minutes before the police officer interrupted again.

In his speech, Anwar repeated the message that Sarawak people of all races are now ready to change the state government, judging from the overwhelming response he had received in previous ceramah.

He again accused BN of sponsoring another "dying party" to split the opposition votes, without giving any name.

"BN knows our strength, that is why a dying party was revived. I want to ask: Where does the money come from? Who is their sponsor? Why they want to divide us?" he said, obviously referring to Snap which was reactivated last year.

Anwar held out the same political gimmick that was offered during the 2008 general election campaign - that should Pakatan Rakyat take over Putrajaya, the fuel price will be reduced the next day.

He even demonstrated how he would make the announcement as the new prime minister.

Now that the federal government has resolved the Al Kitab issue with the 10-point announcement, Anwar turned his focus to the pending court case of non-Muslim using the word 'Allah'.

He said that Christians have used the word for centuries. He cited the example of several archbishops whose names had the word Allah.

Anwar then stressed that a Pakatan government would be fair to all races regardless of who become the chief minister.

"The Penang government led by a Chinese chief minister gave an allocation to the Muslim community that is two times higher than the previous BN government."

He led the crowd to shout "Jaya! jaya! jaya Sarawak!" (success to Sarawak) three times before he ended his speech.

'No ceramah before campaign period'

Malaysiakini learnt from the organiser that the police had given PKR a permit to hold an 'ordinary meeting' but not a political ceramah on the grounds that campaigning period has yet to commence.

Before ending his speech, Anwar claimed that the police would not take any action if the ceramah had failed to attract large crowd.

"If there are only 10 people, the police would not disturb. But when there are many people like tonight, they will disturb," he claimed.

According to Sarawak PKR deputy Wanita chief Cecilia Siti Una, tonight's crowd was the biggest in the history of Betong.

"It is not easy to ask people in Betong to attend a political ceramah," she told Malaysiakini.

Anwar has been restrained from giving public speeches since he landed in the Land of the Hornbills six days ago. Since then, two of his ceramah in Kuching and Satok have been disrupted by the police.

Betong town falls under the Layar constituency, a Malay-Iban mixed rural seat that Alfred Jabu has held for seven terms.

PKR has chosen Stanny Embat, a retired senior police officer, to try and wrest the PBB stronghold from Jabu's grip.

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