

Anwar bets on snap polls this year
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Opposition leader and PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim gave his two sen worth on when the snap general election will be called, reckoning that it will be this year. "I believe that it will be called this year. Whenever it is, we must be prepared. The Pakatan Rakyat council also had a meeting on this recently," he said.

Saying that the coalition would work hard to defend its seats, he also lambasted views that PKR is the weakest link in the Pakatan, having been rocked by defections and Anwar's (left) own alleged sodomy and sex controversies.

"Never mind. Is that MCA's view?" he asked the ethnic Chinese Malaysiakini reporter with a smile.

Choice words for analysts

Despite that, he remained upbeat about Pakatan's chances in the polls, reserving some choice words for armchair analysts.

"If you look at Sarawak, from Kapit all the way to Ba'Kelalan... see, I was there. And you can't just say that (PKR should only focus on) Permatang Pauh and Ampang.

"Those areas are tough, but you ask those analysts from Kuala Lumpur to go to Ba'Kelalan and see the trend there.

"There're no newspapers or alternative media there, only TV. The challenge is serious, but our machinery is in place there," he said.

Ba'Kelalan is held by Sarawak PKR chief Baru Bian. The party had won only three out of the 49 seats it contested in the recent Sarawak state election.

PKR won 31 parliamentary seats in the 2008 general election but the numbers have dwindled to 25 as a result of defections and the sacking of the lawmakers.

Speaking at an economic forum at the Ampang Jaya local council auditorium, Anwar - also the Selangor economic adviser - estimated that the Klang Valley mass rail project will cost the taxpayers RM55 billion through bonds, the highest-ever estimate for the project.

A CIMB Research report previously estimated RM53 billion. The original estimate by the government was RM36.6 billion.

"My estimate is that this will spike up the national debt to more than 60 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) when the project is complete by 2016," said Anwar, a former finance minister.

"The high debt increment will need a comprehensive study and analysis, and yet the prime minister is still flip-flopping over the detailed cost of the project," he said.

Anwar also proposed to the Selangor government to set up an independent panel to study the feasibility of the project.