

Anwar ups the ante on Bersih 2.0
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Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim, whose travel and speaking engagements these days remind observers of the self-punishing regimen of marathon runners, will take part in the Bersih 2.0 rally scheduled for July 9.

Speaking to about 1,200 people who had gathered at the Girl Guides' Hall in Brickfields to hear a briefing on the Bersih march by its chairperson, Ambiga Seenivasan, Anwar, who was the final speaker at the gathering, disclosed that he would be present at the rally, called to push the cause of electoral reform.

The crowd cheered and although Anwar had taken part in the first Bersih rally in November 2007, these days his crisscrossing the country and frequent court appearances in connection with Sodomy II seem to preclude a repeat participation in Bersih's second edition.

The first Bersih rally, which drew a crowd that was estimated at 40,000, was held on Nov 10, 2007. It was a gathering whose size foreshadowed the sizeable turnout for the Hindraf rally held 15 days later.

Together, the rallies in late 2007 heralded the electoral swing that saw the opposition coalition of PKR, DAP and PAS deny BN a two-thirds majority in the general election of March 2008.

The way the government-controlled mainstream media is fulminating against Bersih 2.0 betrays anxiety that it would turn out to be as ominous for BN's electoral fortunes as its predecessor was.

Thus Anwar's intended participation will be interpreted by the opposition Pakatan Rakyat's supporters as an encouragement to turn out in numbers for the event.

If Turkey can do it, why not us?

Anwar let drop the news of his participation after giving the crowd an inkling of his punishing schedule these days.

"Four days ago, I was in Kuwait just for a day to deliver a speech at a seminar on finance," he said in his speech.

"In the course of the day, I was contacted by the representative of the prime minister of Turkey who extended an invitation for PKR officials to observe the elections in that country scheduled for today," continued Anwar.

"PKR sent a few of its MPs, including Nurul Izzah, who was invited to monitor the elections in a part of the country where the contest would be intense," Anwar elaborated. Nurul is MP for Lembah Pantai which counts Brickfields as one of its wards.

"If Turkey can invite representatives from something like 16 countries, I don't see why the authorities here cannot allow the Bersih rally to take place peacefully because it a demonstration of the right of our people to clean and fair elections," Anwar asserted.

Anwar claimed Umno-BN these days were motivated by "the fear of losing" besides displaying sundry symptoms of "the arrogance of power" towards the opposition.

Earlier, Anwar, as explanation of his seeming indefatigability in the teeth of a punishing schedule of travel and speaking engagements, said he took heart from the rousing crowds that regularly turn up at his functions.

"I have a wonderful wife, good children and a circle of loyal friends who give me the strength to carry on,"

he said to cheers from the crowd, which besieged him when he ended his speech and made his way to his car.

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