

**Anwar subtly assumes bragging rights**  
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**By Terence Netto**

Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim subtly assumed bragging rights before an audience of 3,000 people who braved a steady drizzle to hear him at Kampong Berchang, a remote village 17km from Kuala Lipis on the road to Gua Musang.

The people in this predominantly Malay hamlet in Pahang would normally retire early on a weekday, having to rise with the day to tend to smallholdings in agriculture and animal husbandry.

The crowd was joined by noticeable numbers of middle-aged Chinese and Indians, small businessmen and civil servants, who must have taken the winding road from nearby Kuala Lipis town to a clearing just off the main Lipis-Gua Musang route to hear the Pakatan Rakyat supremo.

The brown patch on which many flopped down on mats to hear the evening's speakers became soggy from the drizzle that fell steadily as Anwar arrived from Raub, about 65km away, where he had spoken after evening prayers at a mosque before hastening to Berchang.

Last night the crowd came out for Anwar, those in cars undeterred by the long walk to the clearing from their parked vehicles lined up, either side, along a diversion leading to Cameron Highlands from the main Lipis-Gua Musang main road.

Those without umbrellas were unfazed by the drizzle that fell as Anwar began his hour-long speech that ended a few minutes before midnight.

If the rain had become a little heavier and if the crowd, especially its bare-headed contingent, had stood their ground, it would have been a more exacting test of Anwar's drawing power.

In the event, the drizzle remained light and the crowd stayed still, which was the cue for Anwar to segue into the pedagogical role he likes and, in recent days, has intimated he will retreat to should the 13th general election not carry him to the prime ministerial position in Putrajaya.

The electoral prospects of PAS and PKR are rated better than even in the coming general election for the parliamentary constituencies of Kuala Lipis and its state wards of Benta and Cheka so that the crowd that Anwar drew was taken as an index of Pakatan's chances of capturing what has long been an Umno bastion.

The crowd, impressively large for a weekday ceramah, warranted optimism about the prospects of Pahang PAS chief Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man in gaining a seat in Parliament from Kuala Lipis and for PKR's likely nominees for Benta and Cheka.

The prospective candidates all spoke but the crowd's main focus, as expected, was on Anwar so that he did not have to apologise for easing quickly into a personal mode when his turn on the lectern began.

Tugging the crowd's sympathies

But before thumping his chest in congratulation, Anwar tried tugging at the crowd's sympathies by telling them that Prime Minister Najib Razak had advised voters not to elect leaders of dubious morals.

"You notice," he importuned the crowd, "I don't attack people on their personal morality but they do it to me all the time."

"I try to stick to the issues," he continued, "because it is knowledge that helps to solve problems. Islam requires us to seek knowledge for without it we can get nowhere."

He then warmed to his theme: "How is it that if I'm so low in my morals, the prime minister obtained only 20 minutes when he visited Turkish Prime Minister (Recep Tayyip) Erdogan recently whereas the same man gave me an hour and forty-five minutes when I paid him a visit, also recently.

"How come if I'm that much of a lowlife, I had on a recent visit with my wife Azizah (Wan Ismail) to the world's leading Muslim theologian, Sheikh Yusof Quaradawi, in Qatar, he autographed his latest book for me with the words, 'To Anwar Ibrahim, With love from Sheikh Yusof'.

"Can I be that low in my own country if I am held that high by some of the respected leaders of this world?"

Anwar skirted the issue of his intended retirement should GE13 not yield in a Pakatan victory but he made bold to suggest to the crowd the popular assumption that the opposition coalition would win on the peninsula and lose in Sabah and Sarawak was in for a rude buffeting.

"Change is coming here and in Sabah and Sarawak because people like you are coming out to listen to what is happening in the country. They cannot get the picture from the government-controlled media, so they come to ceramah where we tell them what is happening and increasingly they are seeing things the way we do.

"We explain to them what we want to implement and though Umno says Pakatan will bankrupt the country, the record in states where we already rule says otherwise."

It's close to midnight when Anwar ends his speech by singing - and he gets the crowd to join in - a tune encapsulating the change of government he has urged, but on his and his audience's mental horizons, it's not night but the dawn of a new beginning.