

## **Anwar: If I become PM, I won't stay in Putrajaya**

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**By Terence Netto**

True to his populist instincts, Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim, responding to the close proximity of the rapturous crowd that greeted him at the Perak PKR Aidilfitri open house in Bukit Gantang yesterday, said that if he becomes prime minister he will decline to stay at the official PM's residence in Putrajaya.

"The bill for electricity is too high for the place," he said to the chuckles from the people, milling around the table where he and Pakatan Rakyat dignitaries were seated.

"The [electricity] bill runs into the several thousands," Anwar quipped, as more laughter rippled through the crowd that delighted in his derision of Umno-BN's profligacy.

The organisers had omitted to provide a stage for Anwar and the top leaders of the Perak wings of DAP, PKR and PAS on which to speak to a crowd of about 2,000 people who had come to the open house held on a vacant lot in Simpang, in the parliamentary constituency of Bukit Gantang, Perak.

When the emcee's implorations to the people to move back from the VIP table turned out to be in vain, the evening's programme of speeches had to begin with the speakers holding forth to an audience literally within touching distance of them.

This situation could be unsettling to the oratorical set but not, apparently, to Anwar who has a telepathic understanding of crowds and what would they would delight to hear from him.

Bread-and-butter concerns

The crowd had finished precipitately with their food from stalls set underneath tents that fringed the rectangle of the open lot before milling expectantly at the entrance to the grounds for Pakatan's star performer to arrive in his motorcade.

An elderly Caucasian, white haired and luxuriantly whiskered, with walking stick in hand, also stood in the waiting line but the welcoming committee, led by Perak PKR chief Muhammed Nur Manuty, in deference to his age, provided him with a chair.

anwar ibrahim in bukit gantang open house 1Anwar, mobbed on arrival, paused to inquire of the Caucasian while making his way down the line: "Can you manage?" The response was: "Yes, I can. Thank you very much."

Though seated only a table away from the VIP one, the man who came all the way from the new village of Aulong in Taiping, was unable to hear much due to the human cordon that ringed the main table.

The conspicuously multiracial composition of the crowd and its certifiably middle class origins - more nether than upper - prompted Anwar, who these days saunters while

speaking into the microphone (here that tendency was necessarily restricted), to pitch his sale on cost-of-living issues.

Earlier Idris Ahmad of PAS, likely candidate to take incumbent Nizar Jamaluddin's place as Bukit Gantang MP - the better to prime the latter for resumption of the menteri besar's post - had set the cue for Anwar's bread-and-butter concerns by telling the crowd that each of them were liable for RM16,000 to defray the government debt now standing at RM456 billion.

Idris, living up to his party's formidable reputation for oratorical potency, took several mirth-producing digs at Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's dithering over the date of the general election.

"Parliament will be dissolved at the behest of Rosmah Mansor the minute Umno has succeeded in separating PAS from DAP, " chortled Idris, his humour at the expense of Najib's wife and her presumed influence behind the scenes moving the crowd to merriment.

'Use hand-me-down cars'

When it came to Anwar's turn, he swiftly ploughed the furrow that Idris's banter had opened by reciting the usual litany of Umno-BN's misdeeds, from shocking levels of corruption to gross incompetence and maladministration.

Then looking at the hemming crowd he said: "If I become prime minister, I'll stay at my house in Bukit Segambut. No need to stay in Putrajaya."

He went on: "I tell my ministers to use the hand-me-down cars, no need to buy news ones, we will make do with what we have."

"The wealth of the nation is a blessing that has been gobbled up by a few. The oil, the timber properly belongs to you all," he elaborated.

"The Malays are among the poorest. But there are poor among the Chinese, Indians, Kadazans and Dayaks. They all deserve to have a share in what rightfully belongs to all of them."

This is the part of his message that draws the loudest cheers and the crowd duly responded.

But the elderly Caucasian, whose vision was occluded for reason of his being seated behind the human cordon around the main table, lamented:

"He is a speaker whose body language has to be seen. They should have provided him with a stage.

"Last year, I saw him during Aidilfitri at Meru in Jelapang (north of Ipoh). The crowd sat on grass on an open field. I sat on a chair at the back but I could see him speak. He had the crowd in the palm of his hand."

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