

Anwar predicts minimum 10-seat majority in GE13

MalaysiaKini.com

March 8, 2013

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Pakatan Rakyat will win the country's upcoming general election with a parliamentary majority of more than 10 seats and control at least six of the nation's 13 states, leader Anwar Ibrahim said.

On day one of taking power, a People's Alliance government would liberalise newspaper licences, Anwar said in an interview in Kuala Lumpur today.

Policy priorities within the first 100 days would include education, corruption and government procurement. No retribution would be taken against past leaders, including Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who sacked him in 1998, he said.

"I don't want to sound over confident, but I believe looking into the trend now it will be a comfortable majority," the 65-year-old politician said. "Beyond 10 is comfortable."

Prime Minister Najib Razak must dissolve parliament for polls by April 28, after which an election must be held within 60 days. Anwar wants to oust a government he once served as deputy prime minister and finance minister, and which has ruled Malaysia for 55 years.

Mahathir, who served as prime minister for 22 years before retiring in 2003, took on the role of finance minister himself after firing Anwar during the Asian Financial Crisis. Subsequent premiers Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Najib also held the portfolio. Anwar said he would give the job to someone else if he becomes prime minister.

"Having experienced eight years as finance minister, I know it's very taxing," said Anwar. "You cannot have a prime minister as finance minister. You won't have time when you have forex problem, dealing with the Securities Commission."

Pakatan hasn't decided who would be finance minister nor other cabinet posts, he said.

The contest will be "very close," Ibrahim Suffian, a political analyst at the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research, said by phone. "This is the opposition's strongest moment in the history."

Anwar was jailed for corruption and sodomy after being sacked by Mahathir. His conviction for sex with another man was later overturned.

Since his release from prison in 2004, Anwar has taken charge of an ideologically disparate and multi-ethnic opposition. He has pledged to roll back racial preferences for the ethnic Malay majority and trim the budget deficit if he wins power.

The governing BN coalition won the 2008 election by its narrowest margin, prompting

Abdullah to take responsibility by handing over the reins mid-term to Najib.

Sabah incursion

The prime minister said in December his ruling alliance wants to restore its two-thirds majority in the poll. His approval rating fell to 61 percent in early February from 63 percent at end of December, the Merdeka Center said on Feb 26.

"For Najib, it's very, very precarious because if he loses he'd be out, and if he wins with a narrow margin they'd force him out," Anwar said. "He'd be removed either way."

Pakatan will probably retain Penang, Selangor, Kelantan and Kedah states, Anwar said. It will also regain Perak, win Negeri Sembilan for the first time and make inroads in Johor, he said.

The opposition leader was less certain about prospects in Sabah in light of a recent insurgency.

Najib yesterday declared parts of Sabah special security zones. Police and military are fighting a Muslim clan that invaded Malaysia's eastern state last month from the Philippines to assert its sovereignty claim.

Voting could be delayed in these areas, Bernama reported yesterday, citing Election Commission chairperson Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof.

Polling elsewhere isn't likely to be postponed, Anwar said. The opposition currently holds 75 of 222 parliamentary seats, while BN has 137 seats.

Winning a 10-seat majority would give Anwar's supporters 116 seats after the election.

- Bloomberg

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