

Anwar: Good leaders will smother 'Little Napoleons'

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By Terence Netto

Pakatan Rakyat chief campaigner Anwar Ibrahim said that good leadership would smother threats posed by 'Little Napoleons' in the civil service who may not like the egalitarian thrust of the opposition coalition's manifesto.

The PKR adviser was speaking yesterday at a dialogue session organised by his party's Johor Baru division for representatives and activists from Indian-led NGOs in the state. Some 200 people attended the session which was held in the early evening after which the Pakatan supremo hurried off to Skudai to speak at a huge rally to mark fellow coalition member DAP's 47th anniversary celebrations.

At the dialogue session, Anwar sought to placate Indian fears of continued marginalisation, a situation participants at the dialogue session felt would persist because 'Little Napoleons' in a Malay-dominated bureaucracy could balk alleviative measures mandated by a Pakatan federal government.

Anwar was asked to respond to the observation that in Malaysia "a Malay problem is a national problem, a Chinese problem is a racial problem, and an Indian problem is no problem."

Anwar said that it would be "a question of leadership" when and if the implementation of Pakatan policies is resisted by 'Little Napoleons' in the civil service.

"When I was finance minister, I was asked why a non-Malay (Clifford Herbert) was appointed as the ministry's secretary-general," cited Anwar, as an example of what he meant when he said good leadership focused on national priorities can overcome sectarian considerations.

Anwar, who was finance minister for eight years (1990-98), fended off pressure from Malay higher-ups in the civil service unhappy at Herbert's appointment by citing the man's "good macroeconomic view" and "sound grasp of fundamentals" of the Malaysian economy as the appointee's merits.

"I'm sure people in the civil service will respond to good leadership that is focused on national priorities," said Anwar.

Stateless Indians

Once again Pakatan's putative PM-designate reiterated what he has said several times in the recent past - that within 100 days of the coalition's federal empowerment, the problem of stateless residents would be resolved.

Indians constitute a disproportionately large percentage of stateless residents, conjectured

to be 350,000 out of a probable half million, others being Chinese, and Dayaks and Kadazan in remote parts of Sarawak and Sabah.

"I'm not proposing to grant citizenship to someone who only came here from Chennai yesterday," quipped Anwar.

"I am proposing to give it to people I know such as a case in Batang Kali who was born in 1943 and till today has not got an identity card. These are fundamental guarantees in the constitution and after half a century if cases like these persist, it is a crying shame," said the PKR adviser to resounding applause.

Anwar said no leader should without censure question the fundamental right to citizenship of Malaysians qualified for the privilege.

This was said in apparent deprecation of attempts to question the fitness for Malaysian citizenship of such government critics as Ambiga Sreenevasan (left), co-chair of electoral reform advocacy group Bersih.

On the question of entry qualifications to universities, Anwar said these would be based on merit to promote and sustain "quality education."

"We will give intensive additional courses to students who are poor and have fallen short of the qualifying mark so that they can then qualify," he said.

"To sustain quality tertiary education, we must insist on merit-based entry qualifications," he stressed.

"This is like our policy towards the different language streams in primary education. We will aid all such schools but we will insist that in every language stream, be it Mandarin, Tamil or Arabic, pupils must be proficient in Malay and at the secondary level, there must acquire proficiency in English," he said.

The dialogue session lasted an hour and a half at the end of which Anwar was given a resounding ovation and was mobbed as he made his way to the lifts in the hotel where it was held.

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