

## **Anwar boosts Jui Meng with crowd-pulling power**

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**By Nigel Aw**

JOHOR PKR supremo Anwar Ibrahim hit northern Johor like a typhoon last night, his first visit to the region since the general election campaign started.

He drew a crowd of more than 20,000 people in Segamat - the largest political rally the town has seen in recent times.

The political titan's arrival gave a shot in the arm for Segamat candidate Chua Jui Meng's campaign as Anwar sought to allay any lingering doubts about the former drawing power.

Anwar (left) conceded that Chua had worked in Gelang Patah for years at PKR's instructions but had asked him to make way after DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang proposed to lead the attack in southern Johor.

Praising Chua's leadership for abiding by a difficult decision and agreeing to vie for the Segamat seat, he urged the people there to back the former minister.

"Segamat has become a very important constituency, other than Gelang Patah. We want to win," declared Anwar at the ceramah in Kampung Abdullah in the heart of Segamat town.

The crowd greeted Anwar like a rock star, taken up by his humour and caustic remarks against the antics of the ruling BN.

"The mood has changed somewhat. This is the largest crowd I have ever seen in more than 60 years of my life living in Segamat," said 64-year-old Sudirman Suramat (right).

The largely Chinese crowd also comprised a good mix of Malays and Indians and Pakatan can take heart that a good number of those present were undecided voters from the parliamentary constituencies of Segamat and Sekijang.

"I'm here to listen to what they have to say. How I will decide will depend on what they say," said a middle-aged Malay gentleman, who did not want to be named.

Chua improves on his performance

After a rocky start to his campaign, Chua also appeared to have adjusted himself as he peppered his energetic speech with humour and interacted with the crowd.

This was in contrast to his speech at a ceramah last Tuesday, which appeared one-way and at times detached from the audience.

"The front page of a newspaper declared my chances of winning are 45 percent. Looks like I'm dead, but what do the people of Segamat say?" Chua called out as the crowd cheered on him.

He also sought to prop up his Johor roots and took special attention to interact with the Malays and Indians in the crowd.

"It is said that DAP only received 11 percent of the Malay vote in the last general election. If I get that amount, then I'm a goner. But don't the Malays want change? I as a Chinese will still defend your rights," he said.

And to the Indians, he said: "Are you ready to say goodbye to MIC and hello to Chua Jui Meng? This is Ubah! (Change!)."

The two constituencies of Segamat and Sekijang cover Segamat town and its wider area, and together hold about 90,000 voters.

The estimated 20,000 local crowd last night could well mean that close to 20 percent of the voters were present.

While this bodes well for Pakatan in its urban support in Segamat, the rural heartland remains a problem.

Chua's campaign workers even asked the media not to follow him into the Malay heartland, saying they wanted to keep a low profile to reach out to the locals there.

Nevertheless, the opposition coalition was determined to build on this momentum by roping in PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail and former deputy minister in charge of Felda, Tan Kee Kwong, in their drive into the Malay heartland.

These heavyweights are expected to give a boost to Pakatan's campaign in Segamat, and to some extent in neighbouring Sekijang as well.

However, whether Pakatan can maintain the momentum in its northern front of Johor remains to be seen, with 10 more days of campaigning left.

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