

Putrajaya slams Anwar ahead of tonight's rally

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By Reuters

Malaysia's government accused opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim of "fomenting division" and planning to cause unrest at a rally planned tonight to protest alleged vote fraud following his defeat in a national election.

Anwar has called the rally to present what he says is evidence of widespread fraud in Sunday's election that handed victory, with a weakened parliamentary majority, to the long-ruling Barisan Nasional coalition.

Tens of thousands of supporters are expected to attend the event at a sports stadium on the outskirts of the capital Kuala Lumpur, despite a police warning that the opposition had not acquired the necessary permission.

NONE"Anwar has deliberately refused to apply for permission for his protest, and deliberately chosen a small stadium to ensure it will spill onto the streets.

"His protest is calculated to create unrest," the government said in a statement.

Without explicitly banning the rally, police said in a statement they would not hesitate to "take action" against the organiser and the speakers if the rally violated Malaysia's sedition laws that forbid incitement to break social order.

Former deputy prime minister Anwar has vowed to lead a "fierce movement" to reform the country's electoral system and challenge the results of the election, although he is unlikely to gain much traction in any attempt to overturn the result.

NONEA civil society movement devoted to electoral reform has held large street rallies in Kuala Lumpur in recent years that have ended in violent clashes with police, although it is not officially taking part in today's event.

Anwar told Reuters yesterday that the rally would be a first step to explain the opposition's case that it had been cheated out of its first election victory.

"We've seen a groundswell but that only translated into the election being stolen by the ruling clique. But now what we need to do is to explain and let the people take it up from there," he said.

The opposition alliance won 89 seats in parliament compared to the ruling

coalition's 133, despite Barisan receiving a minority of votes nationally for the first time in 44 years.

Anwar said the opposition had identified more than 30 constituencies out of a total 222 where the result was suspicious and would present proof in the coming weeks.

The country's Election Commission, which is a unit of the prime minister's office and has been criticised by the opposition and civil society groups as biased, is unlikely to investigate Anwar's charges.

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