

Nurul Izzah takes electoral reform to New York

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By Kuek Ser Kuang Keng

While the electoral reform movement in Malaysia is losing steam after the 13th general election, PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar has appealed to citizens abroad to push through the final stage of the struggle - the re-delineation of the state and parliamentary constituencies.

"Right now we are so close. We got 52 percent of the popular support (in the last general election)...

NONE" This re-delineation exercise will have ramifications on the 14th general election and the outcome," Nurul Izzah told Malaysiakini before a dinner with Malaysians living in New York City on Wednesday evening.

"We are asking them (overseas Malaysians) to push the final stage through. We are talking about not allowing unfair, biased re-delineation of the constituencies to take place. We are so close.

"(Prime Minister) Najib Abdul Razak promised many things. One of them is electoral reform, and the parliamentary select committee's 22 recommendations should be implemented before the next general election comes," said the Lembah Pantai MP, pointing out that there are some one million Malaysian diaspora worldwide.

The same message was repeated to the 60-odd Malaysians - university students, working professionals, senior citizens and even several Umno members from the party's New York-New Jersey Club - who attended the dinner at a Turkish restaurant in Manhattan.

To emphasise the impact of the delineation exercise scheduled to start at year-end, Nurul Izzah cited a study by Universiti Malaya's Centre for Democracy and Elections (Umcedel), which concluded that Umno and BN won almost all general elections on gerrymandering.

The charismatic daughter of parliamentary opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim came to the Big Apple on an invitation from a prominent US think tank Council on Foreign Relations to speak at a conference in the city.

During her visit to the US, she also attended an informal speaking session with her alma mater, the School of Advance International Studies (SAIS) at John Hopkins

University, and had a meeting with US State Department officers.

The casual dinner session with the Malaysians in New York was organised by Nurul Izzah's brother Ihsan, his wife Syaheedah Jes Izman and other PKR supporters residing in the city through a Facebook event. Attendees were required to foot their own bills.

Najib administration's hypocrisy

The tired lawmaker, who just flew in from Washington DC after meeting another group of Malaysians there, said her trip, although she was at that time "half dead" , was worthwhile as it was homage to overseas Malaysians who still cared about their country.

"The response (from Malaysians here) is overwhelming, I'm so happy that we are welcomed by so many Malaysians, not just by opposition supporters but also by Umno members.

"And I think this is important, this is very healthy because, as I mentioned to the Malaysian Embassy officers (in Washington on Tuesday), they should take a conciliatory and welcoming approach not only to government officials coming here but also to opposition MPs," she added.

As one of the 11 members of the parliamentary caucus on Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) talks, Nurul Izzah pointed out Najib administration's hypocrisy of bashing the US back at home but adopting a "severe and blatant" lobby for the TPPA in Washington DC and New York.

"Malaysia not only has an ambassador but also a special envoy in the US, and Najib visits the US very often," she noted.

US President Barack Obama is to visit Malaysia next month to attend an international entrepreneurship forum organised by the government.

This will be the first visit to Malaysia by a sitting US president since Lyndon Baines Johnson's visit in 1966.

NONENurul Izzah also fielded several questions from the Malaysians at the dinner, ranging from the recent fuel price hike, subsidies and Malaysia's economic well-being to the controversial film 'Tanda Putera'.

Although she disagrees with 'Tanda Putera' director Shuhaimi Baba, whom she said

used RM4 million of taxpayers' money to produce the film but failed to provide an accurate account of the nation's history, Nurul Izzah defended Shuhaimi on freedom of expression.

"I would say she has to be given the freedom of expression... I agree with you (the guest who raised the question) that we cannot stop people from watching the film. We cannot ban the movie."

Last month, the Pakatan Rakyat-ruled Penang government issued an advisory to local cinema operators not to screen the movie, but Anwar said that 'Tanda Putera' was not just a film but propaganda.

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