

Anwar 'expects trouble' over meeting with Pope

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By Susan Loone

In a bid to head off potential controversy, Anwar Ibrahim has appealed to his constituents in Permatang Pauh to understand why he is meeting the Catholic Pope soon.

Without providing details, Anwar said he will be meeting Pope Francis I in Rome, but that he was not the one who had sought or planned for the meeting.

He has been invited to attend a high-level dialogue between Muslims, Christians and leaders of other faiths in Rome.

NONE"The Pope has asked to meet with several delegates from the meeting, for a little discussion and I will be one of them," he told a crowd of 300 at a ceramah in Kubang Semang, Penang, yesterday.

"There was no problem when Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak or former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad met the Pope," he said.

"But if I do, it would (be seen as) a mistake. The difference is, I did not ask to meet him."

Anwar was referring to Najib's meeting with Pope Benedict XVI at the Apostolic Palace in Castel Gandolfo, outside Rome, on July 18, 2011.

It was the second meeting between a Malaysian prime minister and the Pope, the first having been when Mahathir visit to Pope John Paul in June 2002.

NONEBracing himself for a possible outcry, Anwar urged his constituents and supporters to help explain his predicament to others who may be unhappy with him.

"They might say I want to convert to Christianity. This is our problem, which is why we continue to fight for freedom, democracy, and change," he said.

After his speech, Anwar rushed to his car without taking questions from reporters, saying he had another appointment to attend.

Anwar, who wore sunglasses, a songkok and baju melayu, did not look well. His

eyes and cheeks were puffy and he had what appeared to be stitch-marks below his ears..

Earlier, Anwar lauded the Pope for sending personal Aidilfitri greeting to Muslims around the world. In his message, the Pope had urged mutual respect between Christians and Muslims.

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