

Why is Anwar contesting?

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"Does he possess an insatiable appetite for titles?"

The above was among the questions that cropped up during a discussion on Anwar Ibrahim's denial this morning that he would become the menteri besar of Selangor should he win the Kajang state seat.

So why is he contesting?

Is it to stick another two feathers vis-a-vis state assemblyperson and executive council member on his already feather-riddled cap, which now consists of titles such as PKR de facto leader, Pakatan Rakyat supremo, Permatang Pauh MP and opposition leader?

But in politics, denials and promises are something which must be taken with not a pinch but rather two fistfuls of salt.

Prior to this, it was speculated that PKR incumbent CC Lee vacated the Kajang seat to pave the way for a by-election in order for Anwar to replace Khalid Ibrahim as menteri besar.

Furthermore, the opposition leader's future hangs in the balance with regard to the prosecution's appeal against his Sodomy II acquittal.

Should the court uphold the appeal and if he is eventually convicted, it could lead to two by-elections.

From Putrajaya to massage parlour

Commenting on the latest development, political analyst James Chin reiterated that it would be a mistake for Anwar to assume a state position.

"This would be a case of 'turun standard' or drop in stature," he told Malaysiakini.

"The people have always seen him as a federal leader and now he wants to handle massage parlour licences (as MB) while leading a government-in-waiting," he quipped.

Responding to veteran newsman A Kadir Jasin's claim that the latest move indicated that Anwar has lost confidence in becoming prime minister, Chin said such remarks are expected.

"This is why I say it is a mistake... It opens up the space for such speculations," he added.

Chin, who is a lecturer with Monash University, also pointed out that the timing was inappropriate for Anwar to take over as menteri besar.

"There are many issues plaguing the Selangor state government at the moment, for example the Allah issue (Jais seizure of bibles).

"(If he becomes the MB) Anwar would be expected to resolve these issues, and if he fails, he would be blamed for it.... Just bad timing," he added.

Asked if Lee's withdrawal is unfair to his voters, the analyst replied that the question does not arise in this context.

"It is not about being fair or otherwise. This is the system we are under. The wakil rakyat (elected reps) represent their parties and not themselves.

"Even in the last polls, the people of Kajang voted for Lee because he was a PKR member and not because of him as an individual," he added.

In view of this, Chin does not foresee a problem for Anwar to retain the seat for PKR, provided that DAP and PAS do not sabotage the campaign.

But Anwar's bid to become MB could also be frustrated by the palace should the Sultan disagree with him becoming the next menteri besar, what more with a court case pending.

Betrayal of trust

However, there are those who disagree, arguing that Lee's withdrawal is a betrayal of trust and a by-election, a waste of taxpayers' money.

"Lee said he is quitting for the good of the party... What about the good of his voters? All those who made an effort to travel to polling centres, queue in long lines and vote him in.

"PKR should not toy with the mandate given to their representatives.

"Don't be surprised if this draws a voter backlash. It seems that PKR needs to be taught a stinging lesson," said one vexed political observer.

On that note, some claim that Anwar's clandestine operation had ruffled the feathers of many senior leaders in Pakatan.

Even DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng revealed that he was kept in the dark about the matter but bit his tongue when asked what he thought about the matter. So much for consensus.

PAS leaders have also vented their frustration, with the Youth wing even threatening to boycott the election campaign.

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