

Students storm locked UM gates for Anwar talk

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About 2,000 students and activists stormed Universiti Malaya's Kuala Lumpur gate tonight to attend a talk by Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim there.

Chanting "buka, buka" (open, open) the crowd pushed at the gate locked by security personnel until the chain was broken.

They then marched to Dewan Tunku Canselor, where the talk that has been barred by UM is scheduled to be held.

The students and supporters walked alongside Anwar, who arrived at 9.40pm on a four-wheel drive vehicle with his family.

Speaking from the vehicle in front of Dewan Tunku Canselor, UM student council president Fahmi Zainol said: "I know UM is angry with me. I am willing to face disciplinary action, including expulsion from university."

UM had earlier threatened to expel Fahmi, after the student group refused to cancel the event.

Anwar began his speech by questioning his alma mater's decision to block him from speaking in the campus.

"I have been derided and maligned for 16 years. What's wrong with me speaking here?" he asked.

Moving on to the topic at hand, Anwar said that it is "compulsory" that he be released from the sodomy charges.

"I still have hopes that the judiciary will drop the charges," he said.

He also thanked the students for their support and for being brave enough to be the "voice of conscience".

In wrapping up his speech, the PKR de facto leader held up Fahmi's hand and lauded the student leader as the hope of the nation.

The crowd started dispersing about 10.30pm, with most of those present following Anwar as he left the campus in the four-wheel drive.

The UM Student Affairs Department at 6pm today sent an email to students barring them

from the talk titled 'Anwar Ibrahim: 40 Years from UM to Prison', organised by the student group.

The UM security force had locked the gates and blocked the entrance to the campus to all non-Universiti Malaya staff and students.

It also cancelled classes and shut down administrative offices at 4pm, citing electricity issues, plunging part of the campus into darkness.

As a result, students still in the campus were barred from joining the crowd outside.

Spotted among the crowd was UM law lecturer and UM Academic Staff Union president Azmi Sharom, who said he was there as an observer.

'Good sign for democracy'

Meanwhile, in Petaling Jaya, PKR deputy president and Selangor Menteri Besar Azmin Ali said the students' courage in standing up to university officials is a "good sign for the country to achieve democracy".

He was echoed by civil society group Negara-Ku patron Ambiga Sreenevasan (right) who said when youths stand up for their rights, it is a signal of "real change".

She said that the government likes to use "chaos" as an excuse for not exacting change, like not fulfilling its promise to repeal the Sedition Act.

Snidely, she said other "create" chaos by storming legislative assemblies and threatening to burn holy books so it seems that repressive laws are needed.

"Has there any chaos in this country? The answer is no. Only the government is using this line. If there is no chaos, there is no justification for the Sedition Act."

The launch of the book Detention without Trial: The Ugly Side of the Draconian Law on PAS rep Saari Sungib's time detained under the Internal Security Act, was also attended by PAS deputy president Mohamad Sabu and DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng.

Anwar was due to attend the event in Petaling Jaya, which is also a fundraising dinner for Gerakan Hapus Akta Hasutan (GHAH), but was represented by daughter and PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar instead.

The Permatang Pauh MP however attended a rally in Stadium Mini 3K in Subang Jaya which attracted about 600 supporters braving the rain.

Speaking at the rally, DAP's Subang Jaya assemblyperson Hannah Yeoh said that sending Anwar to jail for another five years for sodomy is not justice served.

In comparison, she said that former Selangor menteri besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo was sentenced to 12 months in jail for corruption.

"Even if Anwar goes to jail, the struggle does not end here. You put one person in jail, 10,000 will rise up."

Anwar's final appeal against his Sodomy II charge will begin in the Federal Court in Putrajaya tomorrow. If he does not win his appeal, he will be sent to jail.

The one-time deputy prime minister has, prior to this, spent six years in prison for sodomy and corruption, but was released in 2004 when then corruption charges were overturned.

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