

Anwar circumvents police ban in Miri
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The availability of a private residence on ample grounds enabled the Miri division of PKR to host for a first time in its history a large gathering yesterday of supporters that was graced by party supremo Anwar Ibrahim.

Past experience had primed division chairman Dr Michael Teo to the caprice of the police, who are wont to cancel at the eleventh hour a permit that they had earlier issued.

"The only way to beat this possibility was to have the gathering on private grounds," said Teo, who has a medical practice in town and lives in a palatial house located on one-and-half acres on the route from the airport.

Teo, a member of PKR since its formation in 1999, said the police had informed him that yesterday's gathering was not allowed even on private property.

"But we decided they had no basis for their stance and went ahead with the event," he said.

"We could not take the risk of holding the gathering in a hotel because of the threat of a last-minute withdrawal of permit by the police," said Teo.

He said the fact that party members were drawn from longhouses that were up to 200km from Miri made it imperative that the gathering not be called off at the last minute. Journeys from the outliers to Miri town can take up to three hours.

Thus from the time Anwar Ibrahim landed at the airport at 11 in the morning, crowds of 800 to 1,000 people greeted him at the airport and later at Teo's residence where lunch was served.

The crowd was composed mainly of Orang Ulu from longhouses that dot the trunk road connecting Miri to Bintulu. Many briefly described on forms provided to them the problems they faced that they wanted PKR leaders to attend to.

In the evening, another gathering – this one composed largely of Chinese residents of the town proper – assembled at Teo's residence to listen to speeches from Anwar, DAP Sarawak chief Wong Ho Leng and PKR vice-president Azmin Ali.



A state of powerlessness

At the lunch gathering Anwar, accompanied by Mohamed Sabu of PAS, also spoke to the crowd.

Anwar told them their earlier resignation to the plunder of their forests by logging companies had led to the present situation where large plantations were poised to encroach on land within the ambit of their longhouses.

He said further acquiescence would mean their divestment of ancestral land and Dayak traditions.

"The coming state election is your chance to end your descent to a state of powerlessness," he said.

At the evening gathering, he dwelt on issues of corruption and abuse of power by the BN government and called on the Sarawak people to make common cause with their compatriots on the Peninsula in wanting political reform and change.



The evening's crowd of about 1,000 people was impressive in size considering that BN component, SUPP, also hosted a function in a hotel in town.

Earlier in the day, a landscaping event, organised by the municipal authorities, did not succeed in diverting the crowds that went to the airport to welcome Anwar before proceeding to Teo's residence.

Even an unusual police roadblock on the road to the airport could not curb the size of the crowd or the ardour of its welcome for the PKR supremo.

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