

Anwar: NEP hijacked by Umno's elite
Malaysiakini.com
April 9, 2007
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Parti Keadilan Rakyat advisor Anwar Ibrahim intensified his criticisms of the New Economic Policy (NEP), saying a review was imperative since the NEP has been 'hijacked' to enrich a few at the expense of the majority.

"Enough is enough!" he told about 800 people who attended a dinner gathering at the Heng Gok Hai hall in Kuala Lumpur on Friday. The function was organised by the PKR Batu division.

Batu is represented in Parliament by Gerakan. It is a mixed-race constituency with about 40 percent Malays and Chinese each and the rest Indians.

It is a prototype of the mixed-race seats in which PKR hopes to make an impact in the next general election whose imminence is widely expected by political analysts.

Daylight robbery

"I call on the industrious have-nots among the Malays, Chinese, Indians, Dayaks and Kadazans to rally behind PKR to force a review of the NEP which has been hijacked from its original goal to serve the interests of Umno's elite," said Anwar in a 40-minute address punctuated with applause from a gathering that fairly reflected the racial composition of the Batu constituency.

Anwar described the NEP's hijacking to special interests as brazen and shameless.

"I'm Malay and I'm Muslim," he said in dismissal of claims that he was betraying the rights of the Malays by calling for a review of the NEP.

"I will not betray the rights of my people but that does not mean I should connive at the NEP's hijacking by Umno's elite like what the MCA, MIC and Gerakan do.

"They keep quiet for the crumbs the elite dole out to them to buy their support," he added.

Variously denouncing the "hijacking" of the NEP as "daylight robbery" and shameless grand larceny, Anwar cited American political philosopher John Rawls' theory of distributive justice to back up his argument that any aid to uplift the poor would entail affirmative action.

But this action, he said quoting Rawls, should be guided by the principle of egalitarianism.

"Where is the egalitarian spirit of the NEP when a chosen few allocate to themselves its fruits and deal out the crumbs to the rest?

"Isn't it time to review a policy that has wandered so far from its original aims and made a farce of them?" he asked to a chorus of 'ayes' from the crowd.

Anwar admitted that the heightened activity in PKR these days was due to the expectation of a general election.

"We have to be realistic that elections here won't be free and fair but we have to take the fight to them," he said, referring to his frenetic schedule crisscrossing the country to campaign for PKR.

"The hour of justice for all Malaysians is at hand. It is time for change," waxed Anwar.

Rights of non-Muslims

He reminded the audience that the Barisan Nasional government was intent on spending millions of ringgit to mark the 50th anniversary of Merdeka this year which he said would be a colossal waste.

"Read the Declaration of Merdeka and see what Tunku Abdul Rahman voiced about the country's aspirations for a liberal democracy, equity for its people in economic terms, and the practice of free and fair elections and see where we stand in relation to others today?" he said.

"Our leaders say we are a model nation in the economic and political spheres. In comparison with whom? Zimbabwe, Somalia, Chad?" he asked caustically.

Anwar said the 50th Merdeka commemorations were being held in a mood of racial discontent and disquiet over the freedom to practice one's religion.

"When the amendments were made to Article 121 (1A) of the Federal Constitution in 1988, it was to protect the rights of the Muslims that matters within the purview of the syariah courts not be questioned in civil courts.

"There was never the intention to apply syariah law to non-Muslims. Today it appears that way to non-Muslims. Hence they fear their rights are being eroded," he said.

He blamed the government for not making it clear that the 1988 amendment was for the protection of Muslim rights and did not entail the infringement of non-Muslim rights.

"Islam upholds justice and does not compel non-Muslims to follow its tenets," he said.

In the earlier part of his speech, Anwar added an ecumenical touch by wishing Christians among the audience a "Holy Good Friday."

He said: "We believe in an inclusive vision, in using the power of the state to foster mother-tongue languages and protect what is good in religions while upholding the status of Islam as the religion of the Federation."

Time for change

Alluding to Malaysia's loss of economic competitiveness, Anwar said he was often asked on his travels abroad about corruption and bureaucratic inertia.

"They ask me what is happening to Malaysia," he said.

"I tell them in the 80s we were bracketed with Singapore and Taiwan but today we are

lagging behind because of corruption and inertia."

"I have been invited to address forums in the London School of Economics, at Oxford, Stanford, Georgetown and Harvard but no university in Malaysia would want to hear me. They are not allowed to," he lamented.

Anwar wondered if the growing rate of graduate unemployment was not due to official policy that allowed only a single set of vocal chords to be heard in tertiary institutions.

"After 50 years it's time to free Malaysia from the shackles of the BN's monopoly on power. Enough is enough. It is time for change," he said.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/65654>