

**BN on the offensive against Anwar**  
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The ruling Barisan Nasional coalition has launched a stinging attack against opposition figurehead Anwar Ibrahim, in what analysts said was a sign of the threat he poses in weekend polls.  
MCPX

Government-linked newspapers have splashed interviews with former "friends" condemning the former deputy prime minister and painting an extremely negative picture of his character.

anwar ceramah in rembau 150208 anwarAnwar was sacked in 1998 and convicted of corruption, making him ineligible to stand for office until April this year, but he is nevertheless campaigning heavily for his wife's opposition party PKR.

She has said she will stand aside for him after Saturday's general elections, to enable him to enter parliament after a by-election.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi reportedly said Anwar had wanted to return to Umno, which leads the BN coalition but that he was not welcome.

anwar tour perak 050308 gopeng mixy crowd"He is not important to me, he is not important to Umno and we don't want him," Abdullah told a crowd of thousands of supporters in his home state of Penang yesterday.

Other senior government figures accused Anwar of being biased against the nation's ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities.

"Voters should remember the kind of chameleon he is. He says something to a Malay audience and then something completely different to the Chinese and Indians," said former Gerakan leader Lim Keng Yaik.

Malay daily Utusan Malaysia ran the banner 'Anwar is desperate' in bold print on its front page.

**Fearful of Anwar's influence**

Political observers said the government was rattled by Anwar, who has drawn crowds of thousands with his fiery speeches and charisma as he criss-crosses the country.

"The BN leaders felt that Anwar was a non-issue but now, in the run-up to polling day his involvement in the opposition's campaign throughout the country has been proven effective," said Khoo Kay Peng from the Sedar Institute.

lembah pantai nomination day 240208 anwarKhoo said however it was "too late" for the government to launch attacks on Anwar as he is an established force in Malaysian politics.

Tricia Yeoh, director of the think-tank Centre for Public Policy Studies said the government was fearful of Anwar's influence.

"It is a sign that they see Anwar as a credible threat. If there was no fear there is really no need to go on the offensive," she said.

Meanwhile, PKR deputy president Syed Husin Ali said those BN top guns who are attacking Anwar themselves had a history of political flip-flopping.

"Charges that Anwar is anti or pro any particular ethnic group are also indicative of a BN that is unable to make up its mind. Umno insists that Anwar has become pro-Chinese or Indian and anti-Malay, while MCA, MIC, and Gerakan charge that he is pro-Malay and anti-Chinese or Indian.

bersih round table 100207 syed husin ali"I have known Anwar personally since he was a student in Universiti Malaya during the period I was teaching there and can bear witness that whatever his choices throughout his political career, Anwar has consistently stood for the rights of the downtrodden and for integrity in public office," said the former sociology professor.

PKR has forged a loose alliance with two other opposition parties who have agreed to stand just one candidate against the government in each constituency, avoiding damaging three-cornered contests.

While the BN is widely expected to win, the opposition hopes that gripes over inflation, rising crime rates and mounting ethnic tensions will enable it to reduce the government's majority below two-thirds for the first time ever.

In the last elections in 2004, Abdullah led the BN to a landslide, winning 91 percent of the 219 seats in parliament. These elections will see 222 parliamentary and 505 state seats up for grabs.

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