

Anwar gains late swing among Malays
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If last night's huge turnout at Lembah Pantai is any indication, undecided Malay voters may yet be prepared to throw their support behind the opposition. MCPX

Despite a heavy downpour, over 10,000 people of mainly Malay working class gathered at a field behind the Angkasapuri complex to hear de facto PKR leader Anwar Ibrahim's rallying call for change.

anwar lembah pantai 070308 "If we win, the very next day I will lower petrol prices," promised the former deputy prime minister and finance minister.

"If we win, tomorrow there will be free education," he added, receiving a thunderous response accompanied by chants of 'reformasi, reformasi!'

Since PKR announced that it would abolish the New Economic Policy (NEP) and instead help needy from all ethnic groups, there has been a mixed reaction from the majority Malay community.

Some buy the argument that the NEP only serves the Umno elites, while other Malays – although not direct beneficiaries of the NEP – know someone who has benefitted, or believe that affirmative action under the policy would eventually reach them.

Moreover, a number of Malays have also felt threatened by the Hindraf rally and what is seen as Anwar's support for the Indian community.

lembah pantai nomination day 240208 nurul izzah However, in the past year, the rising prices of petrol, tolls and consumer goods have drastically reduced their purchasing power.

Coupled with the inability of Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to crack down on corruption and the growing wastage of public funds in the form of private sector bailouts, Malay voters have warmed up to Anwar's message.

The last one week, Malay crowds have turned out to listen to PKR leaders such as Malaysian Trade Unions Congress president Syed Shahir Syed Mohamud, who is contesting in Pandan, PKR vice-president Azmin Ali in Gombak and party's secretary-general Khalid Ibrahim in Bandar Tun Razak.

Despite the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition consistently repeating that Anwar is not longer 'relevant', the government-controlled mainstream media appears to have detected the changing mood on the ground and have all guns trained on him.

In recent days, there have been numerous reports quoting Anwar's former friends plus retired politicians all freely condemning the opposition leader's actions when he was an Umno minister in the 80s and 90s.

"My own self, supposedly 'irrelevant' in the arena of Malaysian politics, has been attacked mercilessly day in and day out with an array of libelous accusations. Ironically though, thousands seem to flock to my rallies without ever needing the sops of money or

'entertainment'," said Anwar in a last-minute appeal to the voters.

"From north to south, I am glad to say that we have made the best out of our 13 days of opportunity," he said of the two-week long election campaign.

The PKR leader has crisscrossed the country in a punishing 12-hour daily schedule which takes him to about a dozen non-stop ceramah a night.

All's well last night

BN cannot afford to allow Anwar's daughter Nurul Izzah to win in Lembah Pantai, as she has indicated that she may step down to allow her father to contest the seat once he becomes eligible to run in elections next month.

Alluding to this at the rally last night, "Hari itu, Pak Lah datang, semalam Najib pula, hari-hari tempat Shahrizat ... ini baru anak saya," said Anwar sarcastically, much to amusement of the crowd. (The other day, Pak Lah came here, yesterday Najib spoke, and everyday it's Shahrizat ... and it is just my daughter who is contesting.)

PKR's pledge to introduce a minimum wage of RM1,500 has also been well received by the Malay urban poor, albeit with a healthy dose of skepticism.

"Ya, ka?", asked a young Malay woman last night, pointing to the minimum-wage pledge in the PKR manifesto. "Bagus, kalau boleh." (It's good if it is possible)

Signs that Malays were against the Hindraf movement were also absent last night.

A pledge by Anwar to release the five Hindraf leaders detained under the Internal Security Act was enthusiastically applauded, with some shouts of Makkal Sakthi (People's Power) heard in the background.

Anwar called on voters to take a step forward and create change. "This is the time for change, we can do it. They (BN) can cheat, but even so, they cannot cheat by much. We have more people here," he said.

"They offer food, take their food, take whatever they give but vote for change."