

20,000 defy police to celebrate Anwar's ban expiry
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About 20,000 people attended a rally in central Kuala Lumpur tonight to mark the expiry of Anwar Ibrahim ban from public office, a decade after he was sacked as deputy prime minister. MCPX

anwar ibrahim april 14 kg baru event 150408 20The crowd defied a ban on the event which was held in Kampung Baru despite scores of riot police were deployed in the futile attempt to stop the illegal gathering.

"We have not issued any permits for the gathering. I advise all the supporters not to attend it. The gathering is banned," city police chief Muhammad Sabtu Osman told AFP earlier today.

At about 9.15pm, Anwar took the stage to tell his supporters to wait two weeks on whether he would be running for parliamentary seat and return to active politics.

anwar ibrahim april 14 kg baru event 150408 11PKR bagged 31 seats in last month's general elections and Anwar had said that one of the parliamentarians would resign so that the party de facto leader could contest in a subsequent by-election.

In his speech, Anwar also attacked his nemesis, former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and accused him of abuse of power.

"He has made the judiciary worse. He is worried that I'll be the next PM," he said. Anwar also lambasted Najib Abdul Razak, saying that the prime minister-in-waiting was "not fit" to assume the post.

The charismatic politician also told the cheering crowd that the Pakatan Rakyat would soon become the ruling coalition.

New politics of ketuanan rakyat

anwar ibrahim april 14 kg baru event 150408 06He said that his coalition will be championing people's supremacy (ketuanan rakyat) and will bring about changes to the economy, education and political systems.

After speaking for about an hour, Anwar was told by the police to stop the gathering - about a dozen policemen interrupted Anwar as he was about to end his rally.

He subsequently told the crowd that he would "lead by example" and requested the crowd to disperse.

Organisers claimed a crowd of about 40,000 had attended the rally. The crowd dispersed peacefully by 11.30pm.

anwar ibrahim april 14 kg baru event 150408 01Top PKR leaders, including party president and Anwar's wife Dr Wan Azizah Ismail, daughter Nurul Izzah, Selangor Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim, PKR vice president Azmin Ali and Batu MP Tian Chua were in the crowd.

Several DAP and Pas leaders also turned up for the event.

Anwar arrived at the venue at about 8.50pm to shouts of reformasi from the eagerly anticipating crowd.

There was a strong police presence along the main Kampung Baru road. Several Federal Reserve Unit and Light Strike Force trucks were also stationed by the roadside while the unit personnel patrolled the area. People were allowed to move about freely.

Once seen as the heir apparent to long-time leader Mahathir, Anwar was subsequently convicted on sex and corruption charges and spent six years in jail, before storming back to prominence in March elections.

anwar ibrahim april 14 kg baru event 150408 03 With Anwar at the helm, a reinvigorated opposition seized a third of parliamentary seats and five states in the worst ever showing for the Barisan Nasional coalition that has ruled for half a century.

Now the 60-year-old maverick is once again being touted as a future prime minister, but this time for his Pakatan Rakyat opposition alliance which he has described as a "government-in-waiting".

The sodomy charges were later dropped but the corruption count prevented him from standing for public office until tomorrow.

Surprise in store

Anwar had been expected to re-enter Parliament quickly through a by-election in one of the seats held by his party, and to challenge Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in a symbolic no-confidence vote soon after.

anwar ibrahim april 14 kg baru event 150408 17 But in light of the stunning and unexpected gains, he has said he is in no hurry to act and will instead focus on building up the opposition.

Meanwhile, party's deputy president Syed Husin Ali had earlier rejected the police objections to the rally, but said PKR had made confidential alternative arrangements for the celebration.

"We will go ahead with it for the simple reason that that area is a private area, it is not a public area," he said of the proposed venue.

"We can't understand why there is this sudden change of mind on the part of police... in fact, they were originally involved in discussions to control traffic and ensure security."

Pressuring the police

Syed Husin said he suspected the government, which has been badly rattled by the unprecedented election setback, may be putting pressure on police.

anwar ibrahim april 14 kg baru event 150408 07 "They might fear that there might be some strong political influence that this gathering might have on the public," he said.

Abdullah has refused to stand down despite the electoral debacle, insisting he has a mandate to rule and promising to introduce long-heralded reforms that voters punished him for never delivering.

But the opposition and many political commentators believe the coalition will continue to flounder and that Anwar could seize power within a few years, or perhaps even a few months.

"I think they are very likely to form the next government and it's a matter of timing, of when this will take place, whether it's at the next elections or before then," said Tricia Yeoh of the Centre for Public Policy Studies.

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