

Sodomy charge to deny him power
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Baradan Kuppusamy

Politics in Malaysia, which have been choppy since the March 8 general election, have plunged into further turmoil after new charges of sodomy were brought against 'prime minister-in-waiting' Anwar Ibrahim.
MCPX

A similar charge in 1998 saw Anwar - then deputy prime minister - land in jail for six years before the country's highest court acquitted him of the charges. By then, his meteoric political career had crumbled.

Having climbed back from oblivion, promising Malaysians a "new Malaysia", and again within a whisker of the top job, Anwar is again faced with the same curse that felled him a decade ago.

anwar ibrahim pc 120508 01Police say Anwar's aide - a 23-year-old man who had joined his election campaign as a volunteer and was later made special assistant - alleged that the sodomy took place at a luxury condominium in Kuala Lumpur last Thursday.

"We have sent the victim to the hospital for medical examination and are waiting for a DNA report," Criminal Investigation Department chief Bakri Zinin told reporters on Sunday.

"We will question Anwar in the course of the investigation," he said, strongly denying opposition charges that police had arrested and coerced the aide to make false allegations against Anwar.

Anwar who fears imminent arrest and incarceration - as had happened in 1998 - has taken refuge at the Turkish embassy, said his wife Dr Wan Azizah Ismail, who is also PKR president, the backbone of the three-party opposition coalition that rules five of the country's 13 states.

"This new allegation is to politically kill off Anwar, and eventually they will want to physically eliminate him," said Wan Azizah.

Warnings from high-level people

Anwar had received death threats and warnings from high-level sources for most of the past fortnight, she told IPS. "High-level people warned Anwar to protect himself," she said.

wan azizah pc on anwar sodomy saiful bukhari azlan allegations 290608 02"Enough government lawmakers have pledged support for Anwar that he is confident of forming the next government," Wan Azizah said, adding that the sodomy allegations signal that the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition is shaken and are attempting to stay in power by using underhand tactics.

There is a great fear of change, said PKR deputy president Syed Husin Ali.

"So much is at stake, they must stop him at all cost so that there is no change in

government," he said.

The latest sodomy charges have shocked legions of Anwar's supporters and have thrown the Pakatan Rakyat opposition coalition into a spin.

anwar ibrahim pkr quality hotel images 300608 01The news of the allegations spread like wildfire through SMS text messages on Sunday, prompting hundreds of Anwar supporters to head to the Quality Inn hotel in Shah Alam, where Anwar, his lawyers and aides were huddled in discussions over how to handle this latest crisis.

Anwar issued a brief statement early Sunday denying the sodomy charge as a "complete fabrication". "I believe we are witnessing a repeat of the methods used against me in 1998 when false allegations were made under duress," he said.

Anwar was secretly moved from the hotel to the Turkish embassy as a precaution against an 'assault-like' arrest by special forces like what happened in 1998.

anwar arrest september 20 1998 221205Turkey has informed Malaysia's Foreign Ministry that Anwar is "resting" in their Kuala Lumpur embassy.

A senior aide said Anwar is banking on his personal friendship with Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan to at least help him avoid a siege-style arrest like that which shocked his family and supporters in 1998.

"We reject these charges as false and stand united behind Anwar and will battle with him to reform the country and ensure justice and fairness to all citizens," said Syed Husin.

"The reform agenda will suffer some setback and could be delayed but we are not giving up," he said. "It is because we have the peoples' faith and their trust that they have hoisted this sodomy insult on us."

The gloves are finally off

Most opposition leaders, while shocked and saddened by the sudden turn of events, are hunkering down for a "long drawn battle" with the ruling BN coalition which is considerably weakened by March 8 losses and severe internal strife in Umno.

bersih protest constitution amendment 071207 tian chua"The gloves are finally off. from now on all niceties are thrown to the wind. It is war," PKR MP Tian Chua said. "It is a fight for survival."

"This sodomy allegation is a devastating development that can radically affect Anwar's ambitions to win state power and implement the fundamental reforms the country needs," said a senior political scientist with Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, who declined to be named for fear of reprisal from the authorities.

"Luckily the credibility level of the present government and especially the police is rather low and most people will reject the allegations unless hard evidence is offered," he said.

"My fear is that national politics will plunge into turmoil as Anwar fights to defend his reputation," he explained. "There will be so much distraction that the reform agenda will be sidelined."

Malaysia despite its fast paced economic development is nevertheless deeply conservative and most ordinary citizens reject sodomy as a 'despicable' act. Sodomy, even if consensual, is punishable by 20 years' imprisonment in Malaysia.

anwar ibrahim sodomy charge not the first time 300608Anwar has always said the 1998 sodomy and corruption charges were trumped up after he fell out of favour with then Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Since the March 8 election Anwar has held centre stage repeatedly claiming the government was on the brink as more backbenchers were pledging support to him.

Anwar needs just 30 more seats to form a simple majority new government, after winning a record 82 seats in the 222-seat parliament.

"By September, I will be the prime minister," Anwar confidently declared last month.

Opposition lawmakers now say they believe the government could have been rattled deeply enough by Anwar's claims to revisit an old sore to put Anwar on the defensive.

- IPS

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