

Thousands at Kelana Jaya to hear Anwar
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Thousands of people have gathered for the closing of the all-day anti-fuel price hike protest at the Kelana Jaya stadium tonight.
MCPX

Among the speakers to wrap up the marathon event were top Pakatan Rakyat leaders including DAP leader Lim Kit Siang, PAS deputy president Nasharuddin Mat Isa and the star for the day - PKR's de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim.

protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 33Anwar who arrived at the venue about 9.45pm when Lim was speaking, took over the rostrum at about 10.15pm.

Organiser Coalition Against Inflation (Protes) estimated 30,000 people were in the stadium to hear Anwar, turning the football field into a sea of red T-shirts.

Anwar in his speech responded to calls by Umno Youth and Putera Umno for him to swear upon the Quran of his innocence at the National Mosque following a sodomy claim against him.

"They have asked me to swear in God's name, but I will do so only if they charge me in the Syariah Court," he said.

"This was the advice given to me by religious scholars in and out of the country," added the charismatic opposition leader who is fighting accusations of alleged sodomy by his former aide Saiful Bukhari Azlan.

protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 30The police are investigating Saiful's report on the matter and said today that they had taken statements from 18 persons regarding the allegation.

Anwar also told the mostly Malay Muslim crowd that if the authorities were to charge him with sodomy at the Syariah Court, they would then have to produce four witnesses.

"But believe me, what was alleged 10 years ago is being repeated with malice and slander, and I will not accept this but will fight it to the end."

protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 31The crowd chanted 'PM resign' as Anwar criticised Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for last month's 41 percent increase in the cost of petrol.

"The people are desperate but the government is happy," he told the rally. "If oil prices cannot be reduced, the BN government should step down."

Anwar said that he was ready to debate the issue with Information Minister Shabery Cheek on July 15.

Earlier Lim told the crowd that Umno and the BN have lost people's confidence as they have failed to reform the police, judiciary and economy.

Day-long carnival

There has been a carnival sort of atmosphere at the stadium since the 14-hour rally kicked off at 10am.

protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 25 People started trickling into the 50,000 capacity stadium since early morning, to be greeted by vendors selling Pakatan Rakyat party mementos, T-shirts, cassettes and posters.

About 20 stalls had set up business since yesterday with traders reporting brisk business.

The all-day programme of political speeches punctuated by musical and artistic performances - which included lion dance, rock bands and poetry reading - continued until midnight.

protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 11 When the rally kicked off at 10am, about 5,000 people have arrived at the stadium with more on their way. Most of them are in red T-shirts, turning the grandstand into a sea of red.

By noon, the organisers said that the crowd had risen to about 10,000 - well short of the 'one million' which Protes was hoping to draw to the event. However, more came later in the evening.

About 2,500 volunteers from both PAS and PKR Youth wings have been mobilised to handle the crowd.

Protes coordinator Dr Hatta Ramli, who is also PAS Kuala Krai parliamentarian, was the first speaker of the event, followed by Hindraf coordinator S Jayathas, DAP Selangor executive councillor Ronnie Liu and PKR's Irene Fernandez.

protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 05 Representatives from rights movements Jerit and Hindraf gave speeches at 12 noon.

At 2pm, NGOs and a number of Pakatan leaders had their say.

Pakatan members of parliament and state representatives made their appearance at 3pm, and at 5pm Selangor Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim was at the stadium.

"The recent price hikes have had a devastating effect on the lives of the people, and worst-hit have been the poor," Khalid told the crowd.

"We are calling on the government to remove the price hikes and end the people's suffering or face being thrown out by the people."

protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 02 The stadium was ablaze with demonstrators in red - the colour of the protest movement. Many sported bandanas with the slogan 'No Price Hike' as they watched performances and listened to speeches.

"The whole family is having a good time but the message here is serious. How can we enjoy our lives when the government makes our survival difficult with all these sudden price increases?" said Mohamed Helmy Nor, who picnicked with his family on the pitch.

070708 06"Protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 06" "The people are suffering and I don't know how long we can go on like this," said 40-year-old housewife P Kalaiselvi, who came with her husband and four daughters, told AFP.

"We would like the government to hear our problems and to help us but they are only helping themselves."

Police and military 'intimidation'

There was little police presence outside the stadium apart from two mobile units. However, others stationed elsewhere have been put on standby in case of any untoward incident.

It is learnt that Selangor police chief Khalid Abu Bakar was at the district police headquarters nearby, keeping abreast of developments.

There was no disturbance aside from a section of the crowd which was enraged by a rude gesture from the lead singer of a band who apparently turned his buttocks to the audience. But the situation was brought under control when organisers apologised.

070708 04"Protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 04" Vendors at the stadium told Malaysiakini that late last night they saw several police patrol cars and about seven military trucks in the area, but the convoy did not stop at the stadium.

In addition to the palpable police and military intimidation, organisers have to fight off persistent rumours that the event would be cancelled.

"Any contrary information that is being disseminated whether by SMS or email are patently false and misleading and are meant to confuse the public." said a statement from Protes released early this morning.

070708 08"Protes fuel price hike rally mppj stadium 070708 08" "The planned programme will not be cancelled under any circumstances to ensure that the people are able to express their dissatisfaction at the government's decision to drastically increase the price of petrol and other fuels without strong and reasonable justification."