

Anwar : Taib's dominance must end
Malaysiakini.com
Aug 20, 2008
Tony Thien

Opposition icon Anwar Ibrahim, who has promised to take control of Parliament and form a new government by Sept 16, has called for change in Sarawak, saying the East Malaysian state has been dominated by one man - chief minister Taib Mahmud - for too long.
MCPX

"There must be change, nobody should stay too long and control everything," he told Malaysiakini when met at the sidelines of his campaign for the Permatang Pauh by-election.

"You cannot afford to have a gap that is too wide between the rich and poor," he added.

bn supreme council mt meeting sapp sabah issue 190608 taib mahmudResource-rich Sarawak has been controlled by Taib since 1981. The Barisan Nasional strongman has through the decades fended off the opposition, helping his Umno-led grouping to maintain its stranglehold on the state. Even now, the opposition holds only nine seats in the state assembly, while BN has 62.

But according to Anwar, rumblings of discontent are growing louder and the time is now ripe to make headway there with his reformation agenda of bringing change to the existing political, judiciary and socio-economic systems.

"The Malays are always worried about other people taking their rights away, but it is their leaders who are doing so," he said. "I received a SMS from some people in Kuching complaining about their Muslim cemetery land."

There have been recent reports of dissatisfaction among Malay groups there, protesting that cemetery land is being taken away and given to big companies for redevelopment into commercial or residential sites.

Sept 16 still on target

Anwar once again reiterated that his Pakatan Rakyat opposition alliance is poised to sweep power by Sept 16, even though it now only commands 82 seats in parliament compared with the ruling BN's 140 seats..

anwar ibrahim exclusive pre permatang pauh interview 130808 05The former deputy prime minister has not given details on how he hopes to achieve the result, but political observers believe there may be switchovers from the BN camp if he wins the Permatang Pauh seat and returns to parliament to officially lead the opposition.

Meanwhile, Anwar also accused BN, especially Umno, of resorting to personal attacks against him in the campaign.

He lashed out at Wanita Umno deputy chief Sharizat Abdul Jalil, who earlier declared 'jihad' (holy war) against him.

He claimed that Sharizat was feeling sour because she lost to his daughter Nurul Izzah

during the March 8 polls.

"For that she announced a holy war against me and Sharizat should be the last to talk about it herself!" he hit back.

Confident of winning

Regarded as a hero by his supporters for uniting and leading the opposition to its biggest ever haul during the March general election, Anwar expressed confidence about winning in Permatang Pauh against BN candidate Arif Shah Omar Shah but declined to predict by how many votes.

Permatang Pauh, a quiet northern town, has drawn hordes of supporters and is now the focus of national attention. While many believe it is a given that Anwar will win, bookies are doing a roaring business taking odds on the size of his majority.

permatang pauh by election nomination day 160808 candidates 2According to the latest talk in the warungs or coffee shops that dot the semi-urban town, the going bet now is that Anwar will win with a majority in excess of at least 10,000 votes if the voting turnout is more than 70 percent.

The Permatang Pauh seat fell vacant after Anwar's wife PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail vacated it to pave the way for her husband's return to parliament after a 10-year absence.

A former prime minister in waiting, Anwar was sacked by ex-premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1998 and jailed on sodomy and corruption charges he says were framed by his political enemies.

He was released in 2004, a few months after Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi took over from Mahathir.

While the previous sodomy charge was overturned by the courts, Anwar now faces a fresh sodomy allegation, this time by former aide Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan.

Anwar has pleaded not guilty and claimed that it is a political conspiracy to stop him and his Pakatan alliance from taking power.

Although the sodomy case is being wielded by BN as their main campaign weapon, Anwar said he has never before experienced the kind of support he was now getting from the constituency.

He said feedback from the ground showed that "the people just don't buy it."