

Meeting Agong? Not yet, says Anwar
Malaysiakini.com
Sept 2, 2008
Beh Lih Yi

Exactly 10 years ago deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim was banished into political oblivion by his boss Dr Mahathir Mohamad - spending six years of that decade in prison. Sept 2 will always be etched in his mind.

Today the prodigal son remains a 'prime minister-in-waiting' although this time on a very different platform - the multi-racial opposition party PKR which he leads.

On the 10th anniversary of his sacking, Anwar looks like a leader ready to take the reins of the country, as he talks about his alternate budget and his plans to form government by Sept 16.

anwar pc on budget 2009 020908 01During his press conference at the party headquarters in Petaling Jaya today, the 61-year-old PKR leader was dealt with a barrage of questions on his takeover plan through the defections of at least 31 Barisan Nasional (BN) MPs.

He was asked to confirm on a widespread rumour that he was scheduled to have an audience with the King at the Istana Negara today to submit the name list of BN defectors.

Responding, he grinned and said: "There are rumours of me going to the Istana, (but) not yet."

Anwar however conceded meeting BN parliamentarians lately and described the progress of his plan as "very good".

"Yes, I have met some MPs from Sabah, Sarawak and the Peninsular. My colleagues and I are finding it very difficult to meet them because we are monitored by Special Branch 24 hours a day, but we still have managed to meet them," he said.

To fresh speculations that Umno vice-president Muhyiddin Yassin is a possible defector to PKR, Anwar brushed it aside and described it as mere rumour.

Rumour is rife about Muhyiddin - the international trade and industry minister - who is seen as being 'marginalised' in the party after being vocal about the party's leadership.

Looking forward to my 'present role'

Anwar himself reminded the journalists of the significance of the day, yet he was at ease talking about the past.

anwar pc on budget 2009 020908 02His wife, PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, looked relaxed by his side while Anwar spoke.

He was asked on his feelings over his 10-year anniversary of sacking from government.

"Now I am looking forward to my present role," he said, although he did not elaborate on what he meant by the term 'present role' - if he was alluding to his 'prime minister-in-waiting' role.

"Today I focus on the economy to show my experience in the past, eight years as finance minister was not put to waste. I can understand the budget better and help craft the budget in a more responsible manner, that's precisely my intention as far as the economic growth (is concerned).

"As for my love of my country, I think the country can be more resilient and I have great faith, with the correct leadership and responsible policies, we can move forward very fast," he added.

Anwar returned to active politics officially with his landslide victory in the Aug 26 Permatang Pauh by-election, where he won the parliamentary seat with a 15,671-majority votes. He was previously barred from running the office following his conviction from corruption and sodomy charge during the 1998 episode. The sodomy charged was later overturned.

To another question, the PKR leader said he has yet to declare his by-election campaign expenses.

There were questions raised as to whether he violated the allowed campaign expense limit considering his army of election posters and banners - outnumbering the BN candidate's - throughout the campaign.

Under election laws, a candidate for a parliamentary seat cannot spend more than RM200,000.

Responding on that, Anwar replied: "I did not (exceed the amount). I did not. Many of the posters were homemade."

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