

**Acid test as 'power' deadline looms**  
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Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim faces one of the sternest tests of his tumultuous political career in the next nine days, as the deadline he has set to seize power approaches.

The former deputy premier will also be summoned to court on Wednesday for a hearing that could launch a new trial on sodomy accusations - the same charge that saw him sacked and jailed a decade ago.

pkrcongress seremban 260507 anwar talk to christian groupsAnwar has pulled off a string of spectacular successes in recent months, including snatching a third of parliamentary seats in March general elections, and recapturing the seat he lost after his fall from grace in 1998.

But despite disarray in the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, there are doubts that the 61-year-old maverick can achieve his new goal of toppling the government by Sept 16 with the help of defecting lawmakers.

"The hope is there, but I don't think it will happen on September 16," said Mohammad Agus Yusoff, a leading political analyst from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

"But it will happen eventually, if the present scenario continues and the Barisan Nasional government doesn't reform."

Anwar is riding a wave of deep public discontent with the Barisan Nasional, a coalition of race-based parties which has ruled since independence from Britain, and which has been flummoxed by the resurgent opposition.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, a grandfatherly figure seen as weak and ineffective by critics including elements within his ruling party, has fended off calls to quit over his failure to check Anwar.

The spiralling cost of food and fuel, a slowing economy and fears of rising "Islamisation" by his party which represents majority Muslim Malays, has alienated voters, particularly from the ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities.

**Pundits not completely writing it off**

Anwar meanwhile has transformed his PKR party - which helms a three-member opposition alliance - into Malaysia's first pan-racial party with support from all three major ethnic groups.

His unerring political footwork makes pundits wary of completely writing off his chances of persuading 30 coalition lawmakers he needs to switch sides within the next few days.

sivarasa questioned by police on balasubramaniam case 250708But PKR vice-president R Sivarasa (photo, right) said the government was going all-out to prevent a mass defection, and that the Sept 16 deadline might not be achievable.

"It's very difficult to be specific about it because the situation is quite fluid... so we're not fixated on September 16 as a date, but we're committed to getting the numbers to join us," he said.

"What we're trying to achieve is certainly doable but we also recognise that Barisan is also putting obstacles in the way."

Abdullah last week vowed to crush any attempts to topple his rule, and in what is being seen as a precautionary measure, coalition lawmakers are being sent on an impromptu "overseas study trip" from Sept 7 to 19.

Both Anwar and Abdullah have journeyed to Sabah and Sarawak, seen as the source of likely defectors. Both sides have accused the other of buying the support of parliamentarians.

### **Court to set date for trial**

Amid the high-stakes negotiations, Anwar and his lawyers are also dealing with the threat of new sodomy allegations levelled by a 23-year-old former aide, which could send him to jail for 20 years.

After being formally charged last month, he must appear at the Sessions Court on Wednesday for a hearing that could set the date for his trial, pass the case to another court, or even withdraw his bail and send him to prison.

pkp keadilan ijok post election 020507 anwar and tian chua "We're not sure, anything can happen. It could be transferred to the High Court, and there may be an attempt to revoke his bail. It's going to be quite political," said PKR's information chief Tian Chua (photo, far left).

Another sexual misconduct conviction would effectively end Anwar's political career, but Sivarama dismissed the saga as a "sideshow" and was also upbeat about his prospects even if the Sept 16 deadline is missed.

"One wouldn't be able to avoid a sense of disappointment, but what we're going to say is that taking power is inevitable, it's going to happen," he said.

"Anwar's had a lot of difficult times in the past... but in terms of his political rehabilitation, he is the proverbial comeback kid."