

PM-designate ticked off for his silence on reforms
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Beh Lih Yi

Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim today slammed Prime Minister-designate Najib Abdul Razak for his apparent silence on reforms of the judiciary, media and the economy.

"He has never talked about reforms of the judiciary, free media, and democratic process.

"He hasn't given a clue on how he can manage the economy. These are all worrying signs for the economy," Anwar told reporters during a break in his sodomy trial.

Anwar, also Permatang Pauh MP, said this when asked to comment on whether he sees Najib as a better premier.

He replied crisply: "Certainly not."

Anwar called on the people to continue pushing for change, particularly since he does not foresee reform even when Najib takes over the reins.

"We have a major economic crisis brewing and the new finance minister (Najib) is in a state of denial.

"He is the only finance minister in the world who believes that the fundamentals of this country are still strong. We don't believe the PM-designate Najib is able to function effectively.

"The problems are systemic: you mean to say (when) Najib (comes in), the judiciary will be independent? You will respect all races in the country? You will dismantle the obsolete economic policy? You will manage the economy well? You will rid the economy of corruption? The answer is categorically No!"

Yesterday Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi confirmed that he would be stepping down next March, paving the way for his deputy Najib to take over.

Under the transition plan agreed between them, Najib would assume the party and government posts after Abdullah steps down.

However it remains to be seen if Najib will face a challenge for the Umno presidency - the holder of the post automatically becomes the prime minister.

PM under siege

Anwar said that he was not surprised by Abdullah's decision.

"He has given indications in the past. He is clearly under siege within Umno. I don't think it is tenable for him to continue under these circumstances," he said.

He also said that Abdullah must release all Internal Security Act detainees before stepping down, and ensure the independence of the judiciary.

Anwar lauded Abdullah's announcement yesterday to set up commissions to reform the judiciary and the police force, saying these promises had been made when the premier took power.

Abdullah, he said, deserves credit for his attempts to battle corruption even though the move was unpopular among Umno leaders.

Anwar also said the opposition coalition is keeping open its options on whether or not to file a motion of no confidence in Abdullah when Parliament resumes on Monday. He was asked if the change of Umno leadership would affect the plan.

He reiterated his hopes to meet with Abdullah to discuss a transition of federal power to Pakatan, as well as economic matters. The premier had previously rejected a meeting.

Anwar had initially vowed that he would topple the Barisan Nasional-led government by Sept 16, but this has yet to happen.

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