

Anwar drums up support in London
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Over coffee at the Winter Garden Restaurant in Landmark Hotel in London one Friday morning, Malaysian politicians and activists sit with a British parliamentarian discuss how the opposition movement could go forward in the event that Anwar Ibrahim is convicted of sodomy.

anwar ibrahim drums support from london 210310 01Anwar (left), in good humour, was unfazed by the possibility of a jail term.

"If I am thrown into jail, we will definitely win the next elections," he joked with Jeremy Corbyn (right in photo), Labour Member of Parliament of Islington North.

"Are you saying that you're more effective in jail, then?" Corbyn responded, and the table broke out into laughter.

Corbyn had filed an Early Day Motion in British Parliament to urge the Malaysian authorities to drop sodomy charges against Anwar Ibrahim.

The trial is a case of political déjà vu, resembling the one he faced in 1998 in which the conduct of the judiciary was condemned by Malaysians and the international community.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and prominent leaders from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association as well as 59 elected representatives of Australia are currently monitoring the trial.

Hanifa Ahmad, a Malaysian who attended Anwar's talk at the University of Westminster said, "With enough international pressure before, the charges against Anwar were dropped. We might see it happening again this time."

Lobbying the British

Anwar's visit to London will draw more support from the British Parliament, with a slated interview with the BBC this coming Monday likely to coalesce more sympathy and international pressure for the Malaysian government to drop the sodomy charges.

The only moment when Anwar lost his humour was at a press conference held at the London School of Economics, when he was questioned on his confidence given that Hindraf had recently burned bridges with his PKR party on March 7.

On March 7, Hindraf leader P Uthayakumar had protested outside PKR headquarters in Selangor, accusing the opposition party and its coalition partners of failing to fulfil election promises to the poor in the Indian community.

hindraf in london 110310 waythamoorthyIt was Uthayakumar's brother Waythamoorthy (right), in self-imposed exile in London, who was the driving force behind the Early Day Motion. Waythamoorthy had approached Jeremy Corbyn in advance.

To the question, Anwar replied: "You cannot fight a racist agenda with another racial agenda."

The following evening, a member of the audience at the University of Westminster asked a similar question: "Is Hindraf your ally or foe?"

In response, Anwar said that it was impossible to correct all the failings of a national system at a the level of one state in the short period of two years that the opposition had been in power.

Hindraf, Anwar said further, has the right to criticise, but its demand for PKR to solve the woes of the Indian community is not something that PKR could completely agree with when socio-economic problems affected many other communities.

Affirmative programmes administered by the opposition coalition Pakatan Rakyat were based on needs, not race, he added. At Westminster University, he also challenged Hindraf to cite a case where PKR discriminated against Chinese, Malay or Indians.

'The problem is not the Malays, but the corrupt leadership of Umno.' he said, blaming the abuses of the New Economic Policy (NEP) by the ruling clique of the wealthy and the powerful.

Criticised for being a supporter of the NEP in his younger years, Anwar admitted that he used to support its policies in his youth. But those days are gone, he said.

For it is the 'Umnoputras' who benefit from the NEP and not the ordinary bumiputras, said Anwar.

'I will fight it out'

Throughout the two talks, he constantly reaffirmed that he is a committed Muslim and a Malay - he neither smoked nor drank, even in London.

anwar ibrahim drums support from london 210310 02Over two evenings of talks given in the London School of Economics and on a Friday at the University of Westminster, Anwar Ibrahim presented the opposition as the government-in-waiting, and insisted that he would not be convicted this time.

"There is no evidence," he insisted, and responded with humour when asked by a member of the audience about the PKR succession plan. "Why do you insist that I will be thrown into jail? I tell you, there is no case? I will fight it out in Malaysia and the international arena.'

His vigorous statement was greeted with fierce applause, despite having evaded the question of PKR succession plan.

Driving home the relevance of Anwar's Sodomy II trial, Selangor assembly speaker Teng Chang Khim at one point told the audience: "If a man of his status can be treated this way, none of us are safe.'

Recounting claims that racist remarks were made at a recent Umno Club meeting, Anwar said such pejoratives were "officially sanctioned by the BN government".

He also expressed concern that such a strategy of playing the race card was akin in Malaysia to playing with fire.

Anwar closed the Friday evening at the University of Westminster by imploring Malaysians to "do their duty" and to use their freedom."

The Early Day Motion has collected 15 signatures so far.

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