

Anwar Rallies The Students In London

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Opposition leader, Anwar Ibrahim's talk at University College London (UCL), was on 'The Struggle for Justice and Democracy in Malaysia'.

When Malaysia's political outlook is grim, with members of academia being suspended, students being hauled to court, and with the upcoming general election set to be anything but clean, his talk couldn't have come at a more poignant moment.

Anwar reached out to the students and his message to them bodes well for the country. The historic decision by the appeal court to free university students from the ban on political involvement will reignite a new political awakening among our youth.

Anwar asked if the critics and skeptics were right to say that justice and democracy are nice catch phrases and that democracy is over-rated.

He criticised the BN government for not learning from the Arab Spring which was all about freedom and democracy.

His contention was that dictators, including authoritarian leaders like those in the BN government would say: "There are riots in Jakarta, occupation of Wall Street...therefore support the Umno/ BN government. It is more peaceful."

Anwar countered this and said, "But that is not the point. The issue of freedom and justice is sacrosanct. You are born to be free. It is not for governments to decide whether you should be free or not."

And he demolished the argument that we should compare ourselves with failed states, Zimbabwe or Burma.

The former Finance and Deputy Prime minister said, "In the late 70s and early 80s, Malaysia was at par economically with Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan.

"In the 90s we were still number one in terms of growth, market capitalisation and foreign direct investments (FDI). We were number two compared with Singapore in terms of market competitiveness.

"Now we are only better than Burma. We have lost our growth."

When Anwar proposed, in 2007, that the NEP be dismantled, BN initiated a campaign with incessant propaganda among the rural Malays that Anwar was prepared to condemn his own race to appease the Chinese.

"Dismantling the NEP is not about condemning my own people. No.

"Do you mean to suggest that bright young Malays should not be given the necessary support? Yes.

But not the rich Malays. Not the billions of shares allocated to cronies and family members of the ruling elite. Not the billions of contract awarded to them.

“They say Malaysia is stolen by the non-Malays, but I am saying it is stolen by the Malay leaders – RM52 billion last year taken by ministers and their family members.”

He decried the hypocrisy of the BN elite and how they make a mockery of Islam and syariah. He spoke of the injustice meted out to Kartika, the girl who was punished for one glass of beer, whereas Mahathir’s family, who are Indian Muslims, could own RM2.9 billion shares of San Miguel, a beer company.

He challenged the students to ask: “How is it that a family of an ex-Prime minister can purchase shares of RM2.9 billions of one company, RM 1.9 billion of Esso (M) Berhad and RM10 billion of Kencana Berhad. A family owns at least RM15 billion worth of shares or contracts.”

He spoke about attempts by the authorities to undermine him with the incessant trials and sex videos and the ridiculous depths to which Malaysian politics had descended.

He exposed the dealings of the BN leaders who squandered the agricultural fund, meant to help the padi farmers, the poorest in the country.

Instead, BN leaders gave it to their crony friends who then sold it on for millions of ringgits in profit. The fund would have given relief for 150,000 families, 95% of whom were Malay, but it was stolen by the Malay leaders.

He said, “You want to help the poor, you help the farmers. The Malay farmers may make up the majority, but also help the Chinese, Indian, Iban and Kadazans....across the board. That should be the way”.

Addressing the students in the audience, he warned them of the culture of fear which was waged by the Malaysian authorities. He related the incident where he was being trailed even when overseas.

And he talked about Malaysian students, principally the Malay scholarship students being warned not to attend any ‘opposition’ lectures. He cautioned them that Najib’s administration feared the truth.

Anwar urged the audience to read Buku Jingga to be aware of Pakatan’s policies. He was passionate about his party’s vision of a Malaysia that will be shaped by its youth.

His vision was of a multiracial Malaysia which is governed with transparency, accountability, and where the corrupt would be punished.

He told the students of the important role they played as they will one day have the country’s future in their hands, “Everyone is born to be free. Freedom cannot be negotiated,” and he stressed: “You must ask questions. You must make a stand and exercise your rights....”

His audience, which consisted of students and expatriate Malaysians working in England, were not disappointed. The event was oversubscribed and the lecture theatre was packed. Although most of the students were from universities and colleges in and around London, some had come from

hundreds of miles to hear him speak.

Many in the crowd had never seen or heard Anwar speak in person, but said he engaged them and was articulate and animated, coaxing and convincing. Their comments are published here:

A Malaysian doctor practicing in London said, "The attendees had a good and engaging session all round."

One person said, "I felt that what Anwar said was genuine. He does not look like a man seeking revenge despite being messed about by the "authorities" all these years. After all, it was Mahathir who has been concealing the truth, portraying him as the villain of the country all the while. Admittedly I believed what the media was saying back then, though on reflection I was still a kid and was naive about politics."

"I sincerely hope Anwar will lead the Opposition to victory this coming general election, and start recovering from the damage that has been done to our dear country."

"Anwar is a charismatic leader who can attract a whole spectrum of people from different races, religious background or social class & ages.

"He seems able to engage with the Malaysian youth from any political ideology or persuasion, to convince them that Malaysians are ready for a change.

"Malaysians who have taken up British citizenship came here to show that they care for Malaysia, despite suffering unfair & discriminatory treatments from the racist Malaysian government while living in Malaysia."

"It was an extraordinary evening".

One young man, Al-Jalori, a Malay reading Electrical Engineering at a London university, was full of admiration, "That was my first time at a talk by Anwar Ibrahim and I am amazed. I support his efforts to reform the country and be rid of corruption, to have an effective allocation of money for the poor, prevent wastage in the country's finances and have a surplus in economic development.

"I believe that these will bring Malaysia one step closer to being a better country. Anwar mentioned young talented groups and this made me realise that future generations, should not be afraid to speak out. Who knows, some of us might become leaders of Malaysia in future?"

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(The views expressed above belong to the author in its entirety and does not represent the opinion of Malaysian Mirror in any way)