

Anwar behind move to boycott by-election

■ **By Wan Hamidi Hamid**
news@nst.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is said to be the prime mover behind the opposition's decision to boycott the Batu Talam by-election scheduled for Jan 28.

According to sources, the two-pronged strategy is meant to save the credibility of both Pas and Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR).

A source said that if the opposition lost, as many expected the result to be, the former Deputy Prime Minister who is now PKR adviser would not be blamed for the defeat.

Even if the Opposition could win, it

would defeat the purpose of them having a nationwide campaign accusing Barisan Nasional (BN) and the Election Commission (EC) of manipulating the election, said the source.

The Malay-majority Batu Talam state seat is an Umno stronghold.

It is learnt that Pas leaders met Anwar recently to seek his advice on the idea to boycott the election.

Although some Pas veterans were inclined to contest, its younger leaders were said to be in agreement with Anwar.

Pas deputy president Nasharudin Mat Isa however played down Anwar's role, saying that it was a collective agreement between his

party and PKR.

"We have to boycott Batu Talam by-election to send a strong signal to the government that we're serious about electoral reform," he said in a joint Press conference here yesterday.

He also brushed aside allegations that Pas was afraid of losing, saying that the party had lost deposits in last year's Sarawak state elections and other previous elections.

Observers believe that Pas does not have much chance of winning the Batu Talam by-election.

"Our party is always prepared to contest. This time however we seriously want to prove our point about

the unfairness of Malaysia's election process," he added.

PKR vice-president Azmin Ali, also declining to confirm Anwar's decisive role, said the decision was not based on one person's view.

Instead of participating in the election, he said both parties would organise road shows to expose what he claimed to be abuses in the current electoral system and process.

"Our decision to boycott this by-election is to give time for the EC and the government to revamp the election process.

"We also want the voters to understand that an election is not worth it if there exists cheating and

manipulation."

Pas and PKR also maintained that they would not prevent people from voting if there was a contest.

Sources claimed that the Opposition would not interfere if any of their members want to stand as independent candidates.

The tactic is meant to prevent BN from winning without contesting.

"At the same time, Pas and PKR are hoping to prove that this by-election is also as dirty as they predict it to be," said a source.

Nomination is scheduled on Jan 16 following the death of BN state assemblyman Datuk Tengku Paris Razlan on Dec 27.

NST - 12/1/2007