

## Just what Anwar doing in Singapore?

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AS CAMPAIGNING for the general election on Saturday enters its last lap, Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim is taking a break from the hustings — to attend a seminar in Singapore today.

But the elections will still be very much on his mind since Mr Anwar, the de facto head of the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), will be giving a press conference to talk about the opposition's chances. Mr Anwar will be a special guest speaker at the Risk Minds Asia 2008, a global financial conference on risk management organised by the United Kingdom-based events company ICBI.

According to a Keadilan media statement, during his press conference, Mr Anwar will explain why the opposition "is confident it can break the 66-per-cent-plus super-majority of the ruling alliance based on a fair contest untainted by electoral fraud".

Mr Anwar's Keadilan is part of a loose opposition coalition that includes the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS).

When contacted by Today, a party insider in Perak said Mr Anwar's participation at the conference had been scheduled way before the election date was announced.

"We don't see it clashing with his campaigning schedule. In fact, we are heading to Johor and Melaka to continue our campaign after stopping in Singapore," said the Keadilan official. Some analysts Today spoke to believe Mr Anwar's visit to Singapore is very much related to the elections — which is why he is willing to take some time off from the hustings back home even as other politicians, from both the ruling Barisan Nasional and the opposition parties are engaged in frantic efforts to woo voters.

Dr Azman Nidzamuddin, who heads the political science department of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, said it is likely Mr Anwar wants to use the press conference here to air his views about the Malaysian elections since the media back home are not giving him much coverage.

"He has been going all over Malaysia and there must be some places where he feels widely discriminated. But with the Singapore media, he can trust them to carry out his views," Dr Azman said.

Professor Johan Saravanamuttu, former Dean (Research) at Universiti Sains Malaysia, said Mr Anwar may use the press conference to urge Malaysians living in Singapore to return home to vote.

"The opposition is very worried about postal votes. So, they need the Malaysian diaspora to come back and vote," said Prof Johan, now a visiting research fellow at the Institute of South-east Asian Studies here.

Now, postal voting is restricted to military troops, policemen and teachers who are based far away from their constituencies. Malaysians living in Singapore have been

encouraged to go home to vote instead. Unlike Singapore, voting in Malaysia is not compulsory.

But one Malaysian who asked not be named, said his countrymen who live here "are ambivalent towards politics at home. They're the intellectuals who have done well without the Malaysian government's help. So, they don't care about Anwar or any other politician."

Other Malaysians who are living here told Today they doubt whether Anwar's brief presence in Singapore will do him much good.

Some feel he would be better off supporting his wife, Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, and daughter, Ms Nurul Izzah, in their respective election campaigns back home. Mr Anwar himself is barred from running for any political office until April 15 due to an earlier criminal conviction.

Ms Santhi, a Malaysian working here, said: "If he's going to wayang (put on a show), at most, he'll get wider media coverage. I don't think Malaysians appreciate a politician who campaigns on foreign soil during elections."

While some are keeping tabs on election news, others are more apathetic.

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