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'Barisan MPs want to defect'

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Anwar says those from peninsula keen but Opposition in no hurry to form govt

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IPOH: PKR de facto leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said that he has met with Barisan Nasional MPs from Sabah and Sarawak over the issue of crossing over without him needing to go to the two states.

"It is true that Barisan MPs from Sabah, Sarawak and the peninsula have met me. I don't deny that," he said.

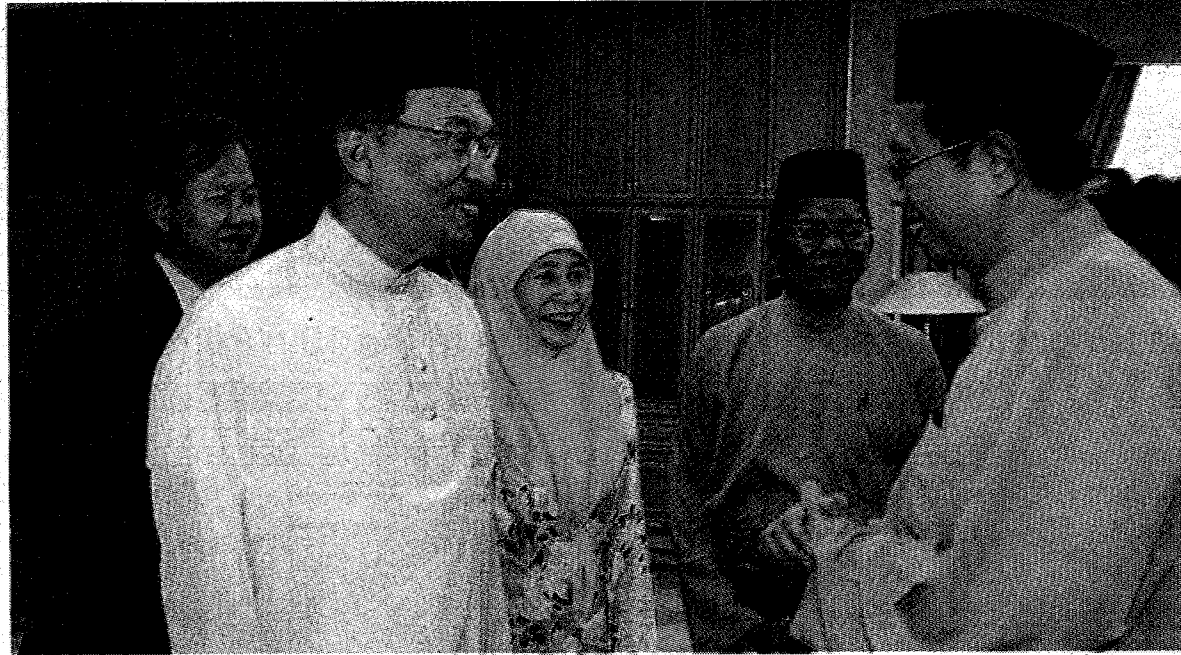
He claimed he had also been talking to MPs from Peninsular Malaysia and not only those from Sabah and Sarawak. He, however, did not say where the meeting took place.

Anwar was speaking to reporters after calling on Perak Menteri Besar Mohammad Nizar Jamaluddin at his office at the State Secretariat here yesterday.

He said there was "good progress" in the talks but the Opposition coalition was in no hurry to form the Government.

"We have the time whereas our rival is short on time. It is up to you to interpret that," he said.

Anwar said he last visited Sabah and Sarawak before nomination day on Feb 24 and did not travel to the



Friendly visit: Anwar talking to Mohammad Nizar in Ipoh yesterday. With them are (from left) Gopeng MP Dr Lee Boon Chye, Anwar's wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail and Perak PKR chief Zulkifly Ibrahim.

two states after the March 8 polls despite widespread talk of a visit.

He said the principle of the Barisan MPs crossing over was based on an "agenda of struggle and chan-

ges for the nation."

"The question of buying people does not arise. It is not our tradition," he said, adding that if the issue of buying the MPs were to arise, he

would call off the discussions.

Asked if Serian MP Richard Riot was joining the Opposition, Anwar said:

"We will make an announcement

»Why 23? Why not 53?«

DATUK SERI ANWAR IBRAHIM

when we have the official letter."

Asked further about an Internet article stating that 23 MPs were keen to join the Opposition, Anwar said the number was only speculation.

"Why 23? Why not 53?" he said.

On whether he would be contesting in a by-election next month, Anwar said the priority now was to build a cohesive coalition.

"We are entrusted with the huge task of (running) the state governments," he said, adding that their task was to give encouragement and support to the state governments to ensure that they performed well in the shortest time possible.

He also said one should not assume that the by-election would be held in Permatang Pauh.

"It could be in Kuala Kangsar or Kepala Batas. Don't discount the realm of possibility in politics."