

Anwar tells Najib to reform polls regardless of popularity
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By Boo Su-Lyn

SHAH ALAM, Aug 30 — Opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim today urged his political foe Datuk Seri Najib Razak to improve the electoral process regardless of the indicated drip in the prime minister's popularity.

A survey by independent pollster Merdeka Center released yesterday found that 59 per cent of Malaysians approved of Najib's leadership, down six points in the past three months, and 13 points lower than his high of 72 per cent in May last year.

Anwar, at Khalid's open house, says it is imperative for the country's leaders to ensure free and fair elections. — Choo Choy May pic
Respondents said they were most troubled by the surge in inflation — which hit a two-year high of 3.5 per cent in June — and the government's heavily criticised handling of the July 9 Bersih rally for free and fair elections.

"Regardless of the support, it is incumbent, it is imperative of any responsible leader in the country, to ensure elections are fair and free," Anwar told reporters today at the Hari Raya open house of Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim.

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leaders have predicted that the steady drop in Najib's approval rating may come to a head in the next general election if he failed to introduce electoral reforms immediately.

Najib recently established a bipartisan parliamentary select committee (PSC) on electoral reforms, but said that the timing of federal polls would not depend on the panel's proceedings.

His refusal to guarantee electoral reforms before calling general elections — which are speculated to be held within the next few months — has sparked criticism that the panel was an insincere public relations exercise.

When Anwar was asked if he was happy with the continuous decline in Najib's popularity, the PKR de facto leader said: "It's not a question whether I'm happy or not; I want to wish everyone well for their Hari Raya.

"But I think it's important that we send a clear message that you can't continue to dictate the affairs of this state as if we are in the 1950s. Things have changed. Libya has changed . . . even Syria. Why must Malaysia be considered an exception?"

The Arab Spring revolution that swept across the Middle East and North Africa since early this year has toppled autocratic regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and most recently Libya, when rebels last week took over the capital of Tripoli.

Anwar said he was not "particularly concerned" with the Merdeka Center survey.

"(The) imperative of leadership is to ensure you honour your commitment for fair elections, free of graft and corruption, transparent economic policies, stop denigrating people and their religious beliefs and culture and race or language. These are issues enshrined in the

constitution," he said.

The Permatang Pauh MP said earlier today that the dive in Najib's popularity indicated a shift towards PR.

He pointed out, however, that rural support remained elusive due to "excessive" government propaganda.

One demand of the electoral reform movement Bersih 2.0 is to grant all political parties free and fair access to the media.

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