

Pakatan will reward 'bright Malays', Anwar pledges

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By Emily Ding

LONDON, Oct 29 — "Bright young Malays" and not well-heeled scions of the politically-connected will be rewarded if Pakatan Rakyat takes over Putrajaya, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim promised Malaysian students here yesterday.

The opposition leader blamed the country's present economic slide on lopsided affirmative action policies the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) government endorsed even as he tried to sway Malaysia's next generation of leaders to cast their vote for the opposition pact.

"Bright young Malays" should be given the necessary support, the PKR advisor told jittery scholars mulling their futures in the University College of London, right smack in the UK capital city with ringside seats to the world economy's collapse playing before them.

"But not the rich Malays, not the billions of shares allocated to cronies and family members of the ruling clique, not the billions of contracts awarded," he added.

Putrajaya's "endemic corruption" cost Malaysia its robust economy, Anwar (picture) said.

The former deputy prime minister said he was accused of being "a Malaysian leader prepared to condemn his race and appease the Chinese" when he proposed to dismantle the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 2007.

"I am totally convinced that given fair elections in GE13, Pakatan Rakyat will form the government," he said.

He highlighted that Malaysia, once a solid economy in Asia during the 1970s to early 1980s, is now lagging behind Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea.

"Now, we are better than Burma," Anwar said, accusing Putrajaya of practicing cronyism and nepotism.

The economic advisor to Malaysia's richest state, Selangor, pointed to the Auditor-General's Report 2010 released last Monday that found many ministries and government agencies had bungled their budgets.

Singling out the federal audit on the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Products' cattle-rearing project, Anwar asked: "Who got it? The first major allocation... not the poor farmers or padi planters. It's the son of a senior minister".

"How much? RM250 million," he said, adding that the amount was part of what he called the "Agriculture Rural Transformation Fund".

The National Feedlot Centre (NFC) set up in 2008 in Gemas, Negri Sembilan project to create Malaysia's "Beef Valley" has been linked to Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil's family.

Anwar also recounted the government's controversial purchase of two French submarines a few years ago. He said the person who arranged the deal was given half a billion ringgit as

"commission".

"If a sergeant takes RM50, that is 'corruption'. So it's different terminology. 'Commission' is halal. Corruption is haram," he said, and added: "You subsidise the rich but you don't call that 'subsidy', you call that 'incentive'."

But Malaysia's biggest economic block, Anwar suggested, was due to the ruling elite's "hypocrisy".

"You can have one family owning RM2.9 billion worth of San Miguel alcoholic beverages company of the Philippines [sic]. A great Muslim leader, we are very liberal," he said sarcastically.

The remark appeared a thinly-veiled reference to Datuk Mirzan Mahathir, the eldest son of his former boss turned nemesis, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia's fourth and longest-serving prime minister.

"But if you find one Malay girl in Pahang consuming one glass of beer, not only was she convicted but she was almost caned," Anwar said.

Former model and mother of two Kartika Sari Dewi Shukarno triggered global uproar after being arrested Pahang's religious police for imbibing the alcoholic drink while on holiday at a popular beach resort in 2007.

She was spared the cane after the Sultan of Pahang intervened last year and sentenced her to perform a two-week community service in a children's home as an alternative.

Anwar was most ferocious when he attacked the Najib administration for conducting what he called a "semblance of support to the reform agenda".

But he may have crossed the boundary when he mischievously addressed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib's wife as "Datuk Seri Rosmah", instead of "Datin", suggesting the latter wears the pants in the house.

Anwar also attacked Najib's efforts to present a new image as "the elaborate public relations network" hired by Putrajaya to portray the sixth prime minister and his wife "as great reformers – liberal, moderate Muslims".

In a bid to rebrand his image and burnish his personal and government's global credentials, Najib was exposed to have spent millions of public funds to hire several high-profile foreign firms, including APCO Worldwide, London-based FBC Media, a TV producer started by prominent US journalist Alan Friedman and a PR team credited with polishing ex-British PM Tony Blair's public image.

Putrajaya has since ended its contracts with APCO and FBC. The latter company is currently being investigated by the UK's communications industry regulator, the Office of Communications and broadcasters BBC and CNBC for selling paid-for content disguised as news.

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