

Anwar predicts 'Malaysia Spring' in next polls
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 3 — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has predicted the coming of a "Malaysia Spring" in the next general election, confidently telling US newswire Bloomberg in an interview that Pakatan Rakyat (PR) will wrest Putrajaya from Barisan Nasional (BN).

"We're taking over the government at the rate we're going," he was quoted as saying in the interview carried today on the newswire.

Anwar is confident five decades of BN rule will end in the next polls. — File pic
The opposition leader, who is facing the prospect of possible conviction for the second sodomy charge in his career, cited the Bersih 2.0 rally on July 9 as a sign of growing support towards PR.

The march for free and fair elections, organised by the election watchdog group, drew thousands of protestors to streets of the capital but turned chaotic at midday when police launched tear gas canisters and water cannons to disperse the crowd. Over 1,500 arrests were made.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his administration's reformist image took a beating in the international media after the authorities embarked on a widespread clampdown, before and during the July 9 Bersih rally.

With talk that his handling of the rally would result in a voter backlash, Najib moved to recoup his losses by forming a parliamentary select committee for electoral reforms, promising to look into Bersih 2.0's demands.

The prime minister also later announced a raft of reforms aimed at increasing civil liberties, including the repeal of the controversial Internal Security Act (ISA) and amendments to other security and press laws.

Anwar said today that with support shown by protestors in the rally, the opposition would still make gains even if he is convicted for sodomy, adding the trial outcome was already a "foregone conclusion".

Five decades of BN rule, he insisted, will end in the next polls.

Anwar told Bloomberg that PR anticipates winning more than 40 per cent of the votes in BN strongholds Johor and Pahang, recapturing majorities in the five states it won in 2008, and making significant gains in Negri Sembilan and Terengganu.

"The trend for freedom and democracy is irreversible. We should be able to do much better," he said in the interview.

Bloomberg then pointed towards the trend for greater democracy that has been sweeping across Southeast Asia, noting that iron-fisted rulers have been toppled from power as civil society movements grew in strength.

"In a year that has seen autocratic regimes swept from power in a Middle East upheaval known as the 'Arab Spring', neighbouring Singapore saw a record vote for the opposition in May, and Myanmar released some political rivals from jail last month," it cited as examples.

"When will the 'Malaysia Spring' be? The next elections," it quoted Anwar as predicting.

"Hopefully, we'll do ours in a peaceful, democratic process," he said.

Anwar, who was once next in line for the prime minister's post, was toppled from power when he was first charged with sodomy and corruption in 1998.

The then deputy prime minister was sacked from the Cabinet and was later convicted and jailed for both offences.

He was freed in September 2004 and resurrecting his own career by winning his old Permatang Pauh parliamentary seat in a 2008 by-election. He also led the opposition coalition to a historic sweep of five states and 82 parliamentary seats in Election 2008.

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