

Anwar pledges to topple BN after acquittal
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 9 — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said today that “justice has been served” after his acquittal in a politically-charged sodomy trial and pledged to topple the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) in the next elections.

“Thank God, justice has been served. I feel vindicated but we still have a struggle. We have to now focus on the general election,” he told reporters after the High Court here acquitted and discharged him of a charge of sodomising his former male aide Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan in 2009.

Anwar arriving in court for the verdict of his sodomy trial on January 9, 2012. — Picture by Jack Ooi
Judge Mohd Zabidin Mohd Diah ruled that the prosecution had not done enough to prove Anwar had committed sodomy against Saiful.

Anwar, 64, had been similarly indicted of sodomy over a decade ago and was found guilty. He spent six years in jail before being exonerated.

The High Court’s decision this time, ahead of the 13th general election, will likely give a boost to Anwar’s Pakatan Rakyat (PR) pact’s plans to take over Putrajaya.

Shortly after the ruling, Anwar said on his Twitter feed that “in the coming election, (the) voice of the people will be heard and this corrupt government will be toppled from its pedestals of power.”

The trial mirrors a 1998 case in which Anwar was jailed on sodomy and corruption charges after being sacked as deputy prime minister and finance minister. He was freed in 2004 when the conviction was overturned.

Anwar has long contended the trial was a government plot to prevent him from taking power at the next election that is not due until 2013 but may be called this year before a potential global downturn stalls Malaysia’s economic growth.

“Malaysia has an independent judiciary and this verdict proves that the government does not hold sway over judges’ decisions,” the government said in statement that also praised Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak for “bold democratic reforms.”

Najib’s approval ratings have fallen over the year due to a growing religious divide that has alienated minority non-Muslims and fanned middle-class anger over inflation and the slow pace of promised political reforms.

Earlier, about 2,000 Anwar supporters had gathered outside the court, chanting slogans and carrying banners under heavy police presence.

Supporters chanted "Reformasi" (reform) and held up placards reading "People are the judge" and "We are against slander".

Today's court verdict had been hotly anticipated for its potential electoral impact.

In the 1990s Anwar had been groomed to succeed former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad until a bitter row between them saw Anwar ousted in 1998.

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