

**Pakatan embarks on post-Sodomy II damage control**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**January 14 , 2012**  
**By Yow Hong Chieh**

SUNGAI PETANI, Jan 14 — With Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's second sodomy charge behind them, Pakatan Rakyat (PR) has moved quickly to burnish the PKR chief's reputation as a capable and responsible leader with morals.

In what appeared to be a bid to assure voters whose faith in Anwar may have been shaken by the sodomy claim and Datuk T sex videos, the opposition pact took pains at a ceramah here last night to stress his piety and trustworthiness.

Azmin speaking before an overwhelmingly Malay crowd at the ceramah in Sungai Petani on January 13, 2012. — Picture by Jack Ooi  
PKR deputy president Azmin Ali told the 600-strong crowd gathered at Taman Sri Pinang here Anwar was well-suited to be prime minister as he had "impeccable character" and took his religious duties seriously.

"When he's at an international meeting, whether in New York, London, Paris or Tokyo, he has never skipped a prayer," he said to nods of approval from the overwhelmingly Malay crowd.

"Even when in a meeting, when the time for prayer comes, he will rush back to the hotel to pray before returning to the meeting. Do Umno leaders do that?"

An internal poll commissioned by PKR in August last year found that significantly more Malaysians approved of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak than Anwar, who scored especially low with Malay women.

Azmin, who has worked with Anwar for 13 years, also stressed that the former did not abuse public funds even during his time in Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Cabinet.

The Gombak MP said Anwar did not go to international meetings ahead of time to shop like Umno leaders allegedly do and refused to stay in posh accommodations to save taxpayers' monies.

"Because he could not be charged with bribery, abuse of power, embezzlement, Umno had no choice but to use sexual allegations to tarnish his name.

"But I'm convinced that he is not guilty," he stressed.

Also present at the ceramah were PAS vice-president Datuk Husam Musa and Sungai Petani MP Datuk Johari Abdul. Perak DAP chief Nga Kor Ming, who had been scheduled to speak, was unable to attend.

Anwar was acquitted by the Kuala Lumpur High Court on sodomy charges brought by former aide earlier this week, bringing an end to more than two years of what The Economist called "sordid revelations in the media, legal wrangling and political point-scoring".

Anwar escaped the second sodomy conviction in his career on Monday when trial judge Mohd Zabidin Mohd Diah ruled that the prosecution had failed to prove he had committed the act on Mohd Saiful Bukhairi Azlan, a former aide.

The Attorney-General's Chambers has yet to decide if it will appeal the verdict.

The ceramah here was one of 15 held by PR simultaneously across PAS-controlled Kedah last night, ahead of what may be the opposition's last national convention before Malaysia heads to the polls.

The convention, PR's third, is expected to focus on four policy thrusts aimed at swaying key vote blocs, in preparation for the coming general election.

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Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/pakatan-embarks-on-post-sodomy-ii-damage-control/>