

'Comfortable majority' for Pakatan in GE13, Anwar predicts
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 6 — Even as Datuk Seri Najib Razak dithers on a date for the 13th general election following reports that his Chinese and Indian support has slipped, arch-rival Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has expressed confidence of leading Pakatan Rakyat (PR) into a “comfortable” majority win in the coming polls.

The opposition leader predicted last night a minimum 10-seat margin in Parliament between the federal opposition and the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN), owing to significant inroads made in Umno’s Johor bastion as well as BN’s east Malaysian fortresses of Sabah and Sarawak.

Anwar even hinted of a coming “surprise” to be announced soon in Sabah, which he claimed would change the entire political landscape of the state, where BN presently holds 59 of 60 state seats.

“I’m absolutely certain, Insyallah, that we will perform much better... enough to secure a simple, comfortable majority in Putrajaya,” an optimistic Anwar told the Foreign Correspondents Club of Malaysia (FCCM) dinner talk last night.

Anwar revealed that PR’s strategy was for PKR and PAS to focus on breaking Umno’s chokehold over Malay votes, claiming that Umno has “given up” on the Chinese and Indian voters.

“Umno’s strategy is to consolidate support among the Malays... which is positive for us that they’ve given up on the ethnic Chinese, ethnic Indians, over the Malays.

“Our strategy for PKR and PAS is to focus on the Malay seats. That is why you see the prime minister’s announcements on Felde... the battle ground is still the Malay seats,” he said.

Independent pollster Merdeka Center recently found that Najib’s approval rating had seen a marked decline among Indian and Chinese voters just weeks after a tumultuous Bersih 3.0 rally.

The poll, carried out between May 10 and 18, found that 72 per cent out of Indian voters were satisfied with Najib as prime minister — an eight point drop from February this year.

It also found that Chinese support for the PM had dropped 19 points from a 56 per cent in February. Only 37 per cent from this segment polled now supported Najib.

Malay voter support for Najib, however, experienced a five-point increase, from 74 per cent in February to 79 per cent in May this year.

A total of 1,019 registered voters — 59 per cent Malay, 32 per cent Chinese and 9 per cent Indian — were polled three weeks after the April 28 Bersih rally that took place here.

Both the BN and PR have gone through great pains to shore up non-Malay voter support ahead of an expected election, which must be called before the middle of next year.

The survey findings, however, suggest that BN's support, especially among the Indian community — traditionally pro-BN — is slipping away.

Despite Najib's soaring Malay support, however, Anwar insisted that not all among the electorate were happy with the ruling coalition.

He claimed that even within Najib's home ground of Pekan, there were Felda settlers unhappy with plans to list Felda Global Ventures Holdings (FGVH) on the Kuala Lumpur stock exchange, despite the promised "windfall" of RM15,000 for each family.

"Today (yesterday), R. Sivarasa (Subang MP) and another lawyer filed for 670 settlers in Pekan a suit against the decision [to list] Felda. This may not change the landscape but it shows the intense battle because these families come from those who are former Umno members and supporters themselves," he said.

He added that many among the Malays were also angry with the racially-charged abuses against Bersih 2.0 chairman Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan, whom the opposition openly support, and DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng, who has been repeatedly labelled as anti-Malay.

This, he said, contributes to his optimism that PR could wrest Putrajaya from BN in the coming polls with a minimum 10 to 15-seat margin in the 222-seat Parliament.

In Election 2008, Anwar led the opposition to deny BN its customary two-thirds parliamentary majority by securing 82 of the 222 seats and winning in five states.

He noted that the opposition's success in the 2008 general election was largely due to the political tsunami in the peninsula while east Malaysians had largely remained supportive of BN.

"[But] I am quite optimistic. The issue now is Sabah and Sarawak. We had popular support (in 2008) in terms of votes here in the peninsula but we lost miserably in Sabah and Sarawak.

"But for the last four years, we have tried so hard and we have capable leaders now. And now in Sarawak, if you go to any longhouse, the Ibans.... they speak of (anti-BN station) Radio Free Sarawak.

"You are also in for some surprises in Sabah... I think very soon you will hear... and this would change the political landscape. We are certainly making inroads and we are able to win more seats... enough to have a simple majority," he said.

Anwar later described Najib's leadership as "weak", accusing the prime minister of being too "scared" of former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, whose statements have been hitting media headlines of late.

Among others, Dr Mahathir had recently said that BN was still weak, owing to the former premiership of Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, even adding that the pact should delay the polls to recapture some of its lost support from the Chinese and Indian communities.

Anwar said Dr Mahathir only wields a "small influence", but due to Najib's "weak leadership", "outfits" linked to the former prime minister like Malay right wing group Perkasa have been allowed to spread their influence among the Malay electorate.

"But do not underestimate...," Anwar warned BN. "I do not believe the Malays support such abuses against Ambiga and Guan Eng. I don't think so."

Anwar also dismissed calls on PR to reveal its shadow Cabinet before the next polls, saying this was not an oft-practised system in Malaysia.

He pointed out that within PR, there exists three-member "shadow committees" tasked to take on a variety of specialised issues.

"It is difficult for us to name (the shadow Cabinet) because we do not know which party gets what and how many seats.

"The representation in Cabinet will be reflective of our performance in the election," he explained.

Anwar also revealed that PR would prepare a paper next week on the pact's economic policies focusing on how to dismantle the Mahathir administration's New Economic Policy (NEP), which he claimed would focus on needs-based affirmative action.

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