

Anwar talks up chances, touts 'mood for change'
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KUALA LUMPUR, July 11 — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has expressed confidence that his Pakatan Rakyat (PR) will wrest power in the next general election due soon, in remarks published today that suggests the opposition leader is attempting to build momentum in his bid to finally lead Malaysia.

"The mood is there, the mood for change," Anwar told British daily The Guardian in an interview published today.

And just as in a recent interview with the Financial Times, the 64-year-old Anwar's bid in the next elections was described in The Guardian as his last chance for power.

The newspaper called Anwar "the man many Malaysians love to hate," pointing to his two prosecutions for sodomy, and his enduring of what he describes as a long-standing smear campaign to paint him as being a chauvinist to a Zionist and anti-Muslim gay man.

But Anwar appeared now to be gearing up for his last political fight, after telling the Financial Times recently that he was likely to retire if he failed again to become the next PM.

"I'm very optimistic that we will wrest control and make major inroads," Anwar told The Guardian.

The Guardian report also noted that even those who did not support Anwar often backed his fight to unseat what some see as an autocratic and out-of-touch government.

Datuk Seri Najib Razak has tried hard in recent times to reverse his Barisan Nasional's (BN) negative image, repealing controversial security laws this year and enacting new legislation to allow freedom of assembly.

But right-wing elements in Umno and the government have hampered his efforts by pushing back against his attempts at transforming the administration.

Despite a new law allowing public demonstrations, the police engaged in violent clashes with protesters during the Bersih rally on April 28, dealing Najib's administration a bloody nose and likely changing his plans for elections said to have been set for June.

Columnist and prominent lawyer Art Harun was quoted by The Guardian as saying that Bersih had thrown "a massive spanner in the [government's] works" as increasingly informed activists point to numerous corruption scandals and police brutality as proof that government reform was necessary.

Concerns over how clean the election will be were also highlighted.

"The electoral roll is our Achilles' heel and their way of winning," Anwar's 31-year-old daughter, Nurul Izzah, told The Guardian.

"Before, it was just small instances ... Now we've unearthed a whole pool of data."

She claimed that, in her constituency alone, she had 10,000 voters who suddenly "appeared" on electoral lists.

Anwar, seen as the man holding together a loose pact considered disparate by some Malaysians for their divergent ideologies, told The Guardian that while PR leaders have agreed to cast aside their differences to work together, there was a broader battle among different segments of Malaysian society.

"We have discussed economic policies, social policies and religious positions, and we have come to agreements," he said of PR.

"But there's a big, huge internal battle among the [wider] Malaysian community between the fanatics and the extremists to petition broader, more liberal tolerance. We call ourselves liberals ... [but] we must put in check, not through brute force, but through active and vibrant intellectual discourse, these [extremist] aberrations."

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