

Anwar puts out Umno fire, says leaders disconnected from voters
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By Clara Chooi

PETALING JAYA, Dec 3 — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim turned his nose up today at Umno's purported renewed polls confidence, saying its leaders could not accurately assess ground support by "staying in 5-star hotels, spending time in lounges and smoking expensive cigars".

Anwar says there is a disconnect between the Umno leadership and the people. — File pic

"That is where they discuss things with their friends," he told a press conference organised specifically to respond to issues raised at the just-concluded 66th Umno general assembly.

"There is a clear disconnect between the rich, multimillionaire Umno leaders and the masses on the ground."

The Opposition Leader said that after monitoring closely the proceedings of Umno's four-day assembly, he was not the least bit worried of the ruling party's latest forecast for the polls, and instead called it a display of "sheer arrogance" by party leaders.

He said Umno delegates at the assembly had only gone on an offensive overdrive against Pakatan Rakyat (PR) instead of touching on core issues affecting society such as economic hardship, unemployment, corruption and poverty.

The theme at the assembly was merely "power", Anwar said, noting that party leaders seemed obsessed with exchanging ideas on how they could cling on to this "power" at all costs.

"So I am not in the least bit worried. They see us in PR and me as a big threat. They are in fear that there is a giant dragon lying in wait to destroy them," the former Umno man said.

Umno's four-day assembly last week saw delegates leaving with renewed confidence in BN's chances at the ballot box with several even claiming that the pact would not only recapture its traditional two-thirds parliamentary majority but also topple PR in the four states it currently rules — Kelantan, Kedah, Selangor and Penang.

Not so long ago, this was seen as a tall order, but when met at the sidelines of the assembly, delegates were quick to pre-empt BN's triumph, even in Penang where the DAP is seen as immovable.

But Anwar said today that Umno's boast was not surprising, pointing out that the proceedings of the assembly showed that the party's only tactic was to use the racial and religious card as a way of "divide and conquer".

He gave a reminder of Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil's use of the "May 13 tragedy" during the wing's meet to frighten PR's Malay supporters, and accused the former minister of attempting to sow animosity between the Malays and the non-Malays with her threat.

"This is not only reckless but highly seditious and therefore criminal," he said.

Anwar said this "fear-mongering" was Umno's way of scaring Muslims into thinking that a government under PR would mean that the non-Malays would rise to usurp the power of the Malays to turn the country into a Christian state.

"Should the rakyat continue to bear with leadership of such calibre?" he asked.

He repeated his debate challenge to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, saying this was still the best platform for the latter to convince Malaysians of his credibility.

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