

**Xenophon's ejection shows GE13 likely dirty, says Anwar**  
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**By Syed Jaymal Zahiid**

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 24 — Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has sent out an early distress call to Malaysians that Election 2013 will be a dirty one, saying the recent expulsion of Australian Senator Nick Xenophon showed Barisan Nasional's (BN) intent on maintaining power through vote rigging.

The PKR de facto leader, in an opinion piece written for Australian media, said Xenophon's detention and deportation indicated Putrajaya's disinterest in free and fair elections since it refused to engage foreign observers critical of Malaysia's polling system.

He said the current campaign for free and fair polls, which drew tens of thousands of Malaysians to take to the streets for mammoth protests, appeared to be an "exercise in futility" given that incidents like the Xenophon expulsion contradicted the Najib administration's repeated pledges to respect democratic processes.

"The right to such a process is recognised in all democracies. Three conditions must be fulfilled: an independent audit of the electoral roll, a minimum campaign period of reasonable duration, and allowing international observers at polling stations.

"The Najib administration's action last week in detaining and deporting Australian senator Nick Xenophon who was in Kuala Lumpur to meet with me as well as leaders of the ruling party to discuss ways and means to meet those conditions has rendered the demand for free and fair elections an exercise in futility," Anwar said in the opinion piece.

Xenophon had arrived in Malaysia last Saturday as a part of a bipartisan parliamentary delegation comprising three other Australian MPs to call on Anwar, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz, and Elections Commission (EC) officials to review the country's electoral system.

But the outspoken senator was detained upon arrival at the Low Cost Carrier Terminal (LCCT) in Sepang and sent back to Australia the same night for posing a "security risk".

In an immediate response to the matter, an official from Nazri's office, despite admitting that there was planned visit by the Australian delegation, said Xenophon was never on the list.

Immigration authorities, in turn, said that Xenophon was prohibited from entering the country due to statements he had made that allegedly tarnished Malaysia's image.

The Australian senator, however, maintained that his trip was official despite accusations by BN leaders that Xenophon was a close friend of Anwar's and meddling with Malaysia's internal affairs.

Anwar, who is also a former deputy prime minister, immediately condemned the expulsion.

The PKR leader said Xenophon's presence along with other international observers would have helped ensure accountability on the part of Putrajaya in ensuring that alleged discrepancies in the election system would be addressed.

Anwar pointed out that PR was still without access to the mainstream media, which was largely controlled by the government.

Concerns over the integrity of the electoral roll raised by the opposition and poll reform groups like Bersih have gone unheeded while money politics continue unabated, the PKR leader said.

He noted the absence of independent foreign observers would hamstring the federal opposition, which some observers believe could cause an upset at Election 2013 that must be held by June.

"The opposition coalition Pakatan Rakyat remains severely disadvantaged in campaigning.

"In this regard, Nick Xenophon as well as other international would be observers will no doubt be a threat but only to those who believe they are entitled to perpetual power," he said.

The EC recently said it will allow independent observers, including those handpicked from the ASEAN region, to scrutinise the upcoming polls following accusations of bias which it denied.

But the commission's sincerity was called into question after it imposed strict guidelines that some quarters claimed would hobble the observation process.

Opposition requests for observation missions from the West and Australia have also been denied, often without any justification.

Anwar said Putrajaya's failure to observe international standards for conducting elections signified murkiness in its actions.

"Indeed, the test of free and fair elections is not merely allowing international observers but welcoming them with open arms because they lend credibility to the process as well as the outcome. If our elections are free and fair, what's there to hide?" He said.

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