

**GE13 not a PM race, Anwar tells Perak
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BY CLARA CHOOI**

IPOH, April 16 — The looming May 5 polls is not a prime minister race or a contest of party insignias but a pursuit of moral change and equality, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said last night as he humbled himself to a massive crowd of urban Malay folk at the iconic Gugusan Manjoi here.

Anwar, his voice breaking as he preached his belief in justice for all races, said he was thankful to God that he had survived his six-year incarceration but was now anxious to ensure that no one else would be put through the same test.

"This election is not a question about replacing the prime minister, or replacing parties... I remind you my friends, even if we replace the PM, but he is just as conceited, land disappears in the same way, the people's incomes are stagnant — what good is there in that?"

"People are voting for change. We, as Muslims, we believe in an administration that is founded on good morals," he said.

The veteran politician, whose theatrics was not lost on the Malay-dominated crowd of at least 2,000 people seated on a boggy field, repeatedly said he had long forgiven those who dragged him from his comfortable perch as deputy prime minister to prison more than a decade back but said the suffering he went through would not be forgotten.

He said PAS spiritual adviser Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat had urged him to forgive but never to forget his experiences so that should Pakatan Rakyat (PR) come to power, no Malaysian would have to suffer like he had.

"Do not forget how the feeling of pain, do not forget what it feels like to be beaten, do not forget what it feels like to be poor, do not forget what it feels like to be insulted, to be victimised, so that when you rule, never for once allow any person in the community, whether Malay, Chinese, Indian, Dayak or Kadazan, to be victimised in the same way or be ignored," Anwar (picture) said, quoting Nik Aziz's advice.

Rapt applause and hoots greeted Anwar's emotion-filled words, which were slowly enunciated into the microphone.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this, you cannot buy, this, you cannot learn, for this, there is no book. This, you get only when Allah throws us into the most despicable condition... and then brings us back so that we are stronger and tougher... and that is why I am so grateful to God," he added.

Gugusan Manjoi is a large and populous cluster of both traditional and planned Malay villages sited in the heart of the city and is known as an Umno stronghold despite its close proximity to the surrounding Chinese-majority opposition strongholds of Ipoh Timor and Ipoh Barat.

Manjoi is an Umno-held state seat in the Tambun parliamentary constituency, which is currently held by incumbent and interim Finance Minister II Datuk Seri Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah.

But Anwar, who recently toyed with the option of taking on Husni in Tambun this May 5, played to the gallery from start to finish as he pushed hard to break Umno's grasp over Perak's Malay vote.

When he first arrived just before 11pm, the 65-year-old political veteran even walked straight into the thick of the crowd to seat cross-legged on the ground with constituents, who rushed forward and pushed one another to greet him.

In his speech, Anwar promised to narrow the country's Gini coefficient (measure of the inequality of wealth distribution), lower fuel prices, weed out corruption and ensure every Malaysian is offered fair treatment, regardless of their racial differences.

Barisan Nasional (BN) helms Perak with tenuous control of just 28 state seats, earning its seat in the state administration with pledges from four former PR assemblymen to be "BN-friendly independents".

The pact had initially lost Perak during the tumultuous 2008 polls when opposition parties DAP, PKR and PAS swept 31 seats to BN's 28 in the 59-seat assembly, allowing it to form the state government with a shaky three-seat majority.

This time, PR is bent on ensuring BN is toppled once more in Perak, but is finding it hard to break into the Malay vote, having only earned some 28 per cent of the community's support in the last election.

Former Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Nizar Jamaluddin has even resorted to hosting weekly breakfast sessions to encourage people out from their homes, noting that in many areas outside the city Umno's influence is still strong.

But when met on the sidelines of last night's ceramah, Perak PKR deputy chief and state election director Dr Lee Boon Chye expressed confidence that at least 40 seats will be PR's after balloting ends on May 5.

Pointing to the ceramah crowd and the demographics of the Tambun seat to back his prediction, the leader said a victory was likely on the cards for PR.

"Yes, I am confident, you look at the response, you look at the crowd. I've been on the ground since the dissolution of Parliament and I am positive about the response from the rakyat," he said.

"For Tambun, if you talk about the urban Malays, Tambun has the largest population of urban Malays — lots of government servants, a lot of professionals, and a lot of youngsters," he added, noting that PKR's candidate Siti Aishah Shaik Ismail was the best person to lead the charge here.

At the ceramah later, Anwar introduced Perak PKR's candidates for the polls, at least two-thirds of whom are new, fresh-faced politicians.

The party retained only four incumbents — Dr Lee in the Gopeng parliamentary seat and for the state seats, Chang Lih Kang (Teja), Abdul Yunus Jamahari (Kuala Kurau) and S. Kesavan (Hutan Melintang).

Kuala Sapetang assemblyman Tai Sing Ng was axed from the list, while Simpang Pulai

assemblyman Chan Ming Kai will move to contest a seat in Perlis.

Anwar stopped short of announcing the candidate for the Manong state seat, however, due to ongoing negotiations with PAS, which has taken over PKR's Changkat Jering seat and given it to Nizar to contest.

In total, PKR is contesting nine parliamentary seats and, minus Changkat Jering, 20 state seats. The party contested 10 parliamentary and 21 state seats in Election 2008.

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