

Anwar vows more rallies to challenge BN mandate
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By Emily Ding

PETALING JAYA, May 9 — Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has pledged more rallies across the country for a “national consensus” to question the legitimacy of the re-elected Barisan Nasional (BN) government over allegations of electoral fraud, starting with Penang this weekend.

He told over 60,000 people at a rally in Stadium MBPJ here last night that their attendance would send a message to BN that its lacklustre election victory was not due to a “Chinese tsunami” as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had said, but a “Malaysian tsunami” of all races.

“I want to show Najib this is not a Chinese battle, this is not a Malay battle. We will go to every corner of this country to show we have the support of Malaysians,” Anwar said in a rousing speech.

Observers said the multiracial crowd that packed like sardines into the stadium — usually with a capacity of 25,000 — reflected his claim. The roads outside the stadium were a giant parking lot for kilometres as more tried to cram into the stadium.

A mixed group of young people who had just met held up placards reading “Cina Kawan Saya” and “Melayu Kawan Aku” while they took a photograph together.

Khamis Ahmad Kamil, a 67-year-old ex-soldier, told The Malaysian Insider: “What was Najib talking about? There are so many races here. Everyone is here sitting and standing for one thing — clean elections.”

A view of the crowd at last night’s rally. — Picture by Saw Siow Feng
Anwar told the crowd: “There are people who ask me to retreat, but I want to tell you, Pakatan Rakyat (PR) won! Because PR won, I will never retreat!”

The Permatang Pauh MP and electoral reform group Bersih have announced that they are withholding their recognition of BN’s win in the general election until the allegations of vote-rigging are fully verified and investigated.

During the campaign and polling period, BN had been accused of vote-buying with cash handouts, conspiring with the Election Commission (EC) to use “indelible ink” that proved to be easily washed off to allow double voting, and flying planeloads of foreigners from east Malaysia to vote in crucial constituencies in the peninsula.

Riding on the popular vote, Anwar pointed out that despite BN’s cheating tactics, 51.4 per cent of Malaysians and about 55 per cent of Perak folk supported PR though this did not translate into an opposition win at the federal level or in the northern state.

With only 48.6 per cent of the popular vote, BN managed to keep its mandate to rule the country due to a history of gerrymandering and delineation of constituencies skewed in favour of BN.

He said that as a consequence, the results of some 30 federal seats are in doubt, bringing

into question the standing of the BN government that was formed with just 133 seats, 21 seats more than the 112 required to win by a simple majority.

"It does not matter if you crown yourself, Najib knows there is the problem of legitimacy," he said, to rip-roaring hoots from the crowd.

Despite the sombre dress code of black to connote the "death" of democracy, colourful party flags and umbrellas brightened up the dark sea as Anwar led the crowd in unison chants of "Reformasi!" and "Ubah!"

The swelling crowd was alive with energy and a sense that an injustice had been done, as Anwar added a new battle cry to his already-formidable ammunition: "Suara rakyat, suara keramat!"

"I see all these people here, and I am surprised how Pakatan can lose with all this support. How is it that BN can win? They must have made a mistake. I want a recount, or a re-election," ex-soldier Khamis also said.

Another view of the huge crowd at last night's rally. — Picture by Saw Siow Feng
Anwar urged the crowd not to be afraid through the coming weeks, saying: "We are on the side of a just, peaceful struggle against a corrupt and arrogant Umno/BN."

He has 21 days to file a court petition for a review of the results and if the existence of electoral fraud is proven, a High Court judge will declare the election result invalid and call for a re-election.

A 21-year-old Malay student told The Malaysian Insider that attending the rally had made him feel united in a common cause with his fellow Malaysians and that he was optimistic about what might happen in the next few weeks.

"I think this rally has given Malaysia new hope. I think something could change. There could be a re-election and the results could change," he said.

Kumaravignesh Jagatheesan, a 23-year-old student, also said he wants a re-election because he wants Anwar to be the new prime minister as a man of "calibre" who stands for democracy.

When asked how he would feel if re-election did not pan out, he joked: "I'll change country!"

The rally was a peaceful one and no police presence was seen or felt.

In a show of unity and neighbourly civic-mindedness, rally-goers helped each other navigate some of the logistical difficulties.

When the stadium was filled to the brim and there was no longer any way in on street level, groups of Malaysians helped each other scale the stadium walls with only a rope, buffered by support on both sides.

When the rally concluded and the crowd had to pick their way out in the dark, Malaysians stood guard at every gaping drain in the ground, shining their torches into it to prevent others from falling in.

Several also acted as citizen traffic police in an attempt to control and ease the jam in the area, which saw many rally-goers park several kilometres away from the stadium and walk the distance.

The rally was attended by several personalities including Anwar's eldest daughter and Lembah Pantai MP Nurul Izzah Anwar, DAP leader and Gelang Patah MP Lim Kit Siang, and Bandar Tun Razak MP and former Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim.

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