

Emotional PKR Congress backs Anwar for PM

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PPBM chairman Dr Mahathir Mohamad sidesteps questions on whether he supports the PKR de facto leader to lead the country

HAH ALAM: The 12th PKR National Congress opened today with an emotional speech by president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail in which she invoked the struggle of her husband, former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim, to rouse people to vote for the opposition.

The event saw party delegates holding up placards that read “Anwar the 7th PM” in reference to the call for Pakatan Harapan (PH) to choose the PKR de facto leader as prime minister in the event of an opposition victory in the 14th general election (GE14).

Among those who held up the cards was DAP parliamentary leader Lim Kit Siang.

PPBM chairman and former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was also present, was surrounded by reporters who asked how he felt about attending the gathering of PKR, which was formed after he had fired Anwar from the government and as deputy prime minister in 1998.

“This congress is PKR’s. It’s not me who put him in jail (this time). That’s an old story. Najib is the one who put him (in prison),” Mahathir said.

Asked if he supported Anwar to be the next prime minister, he said: “That’s up to anyone.”

Mahathir later signed a petition to have Anwar freed. He was seen signing the petition before exiting the congress.

During Mahathir’s rule, Anwar was sentenced to six years in prison for corruption on April 14, 1999, and nine years for sodomy on Aug 8, 2000. The sentences were to be served consecutively.

In an interview with SBS, an Australian broadcast agency, aired on May 13, Mahathir had said there was no need to apologise to Anwar as the incident was “in the past” and not related to his current imprisonment.

At the PKR Youth Congress yesterday, its chief Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad had said that the wing wanted Wan Azizah to be Pakatan Harapan's choice for prime minister "in transition" in the event of a victory in GE14, until Anwar is released from prison and can take over.

Wan Azizah said Anwar, who is the party's de facto leader, had been in jail for more than 800 days.

"He is in jail for the people. Come, let's move into victory," she said, visibly holding back tears, amid shouts of "Reformasi" and "Bebas Anwar" (free Anwar) from the floor.

She urged party members to go all out to ensure the opposition wins the next general election which must be held by the middle of next year.

The gathering at the Dewan Raja Muda Musa here was earlier shown a video of Wan Azizah's childhood and her life with Anwar,

While reading her policy speech, the Permatang Pauh MP said she had given the party's state chiefs three months to conduct 300 rallies, dialogue sessions and community-based activities.

"They (PKR members) have to be result-oriented. They have to meet the people and explain the party's agenda," she said.

She also announced the "Bill Kayong Award", named after the Sarawak-based PKR member and indigenous and land rights activist who was assassinated on June 21 last year, to honour individuals who had struggled for the people.

Among the other opposition politicians present were PPBM president Muhyiddin Yassin and Amanah president Mohamad Sabu.

Also present at the congress were representatives from the embassies of the United States and Japan, and representatives from the high commissions of Britain and Australia.

Anwar is now serving a five-year jail term after losing his appeal at the Federal Court on Feb 10, 2015, to set aside his conviction on a charge of sodomising his former aide Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan in 2008.

Various local and international human rights groups have criticised the imprisonment as being politically motivated.

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