

# Anwar welcomes by-election challenge

Contest is essential to democracy, he says at SMU event

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As he watched his former nemesis Mahathir Mohamad being sworn in as Malaysia's seventh prime minister on TV, politician Anwar Ibrahim thought to himself from his hospital bed: "It should be me, not you."

On hearing this candid response to a question from a student at Singapore Management University (SMU) yesterday, the audience of about 1,200 students, academics and diplomats laughed and clapped wildly.

For two hours, Mr Anwar, de facto leader of Malaysia's ruling Pakatan Harapan coalition, was quizzed on a range of issues, from Singapore-Malaysia bilateral relations and plans when he becomes Malaysia's prime minister, to what keeps him awake

at night.

Said the charismatic reformer, referring to his wife, Deputy Prime Minister Wan Azizah Wan Ismail: "What keeps me awake at night is Azizah. If she doesn't bother me, I can sleep."

The robust question-and-answer session was the highlight of the session with Mr Anwar, titled Leadership In The 21st Century: Winds Of Change.

## SERIES

It is part of SMU's Ho Rih Hwa Leadership lecture series with notable entrepreneurs, business leaders and political figures.

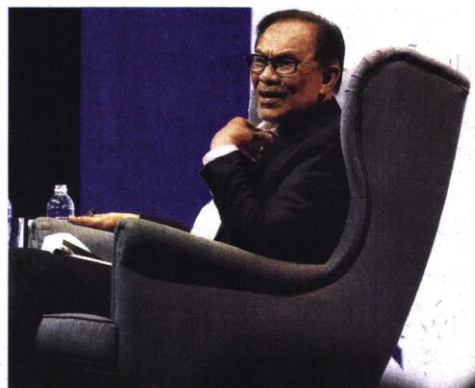
Mr Anwar peppered his speech with quotes from poets and philosophers, and touched on ongoing trade tensions

between the US and China, the need to nurture creative minds and the need for leaders to maintain values such as humility and compassion.

Yesterday's lecture came hours after Malaysia's Election Commission announced that the by-election for Port Dickson, needed to pave the way for Mr Anwar's return to Parliament, will be held on Oct 13. Nomination Day is on Sept 29.

The 71-year-old was upbeat about his chances. "Some people say why should you (face a) challenge, you should win uncontested. Okay, but who am I to claim I'm the supremo that nobody can challenge? No, I welcome a challenge... I will have to appeal to the voters."

Mr Anwar compares the looming by-election to the battle



Mr Anwar Ibrahim peppered his speech with quotes from poets and philosophers.

TNP PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

between his former protégé, Economic Affairs Minister Azmin Ali, and party vice-president Rafizi Ramli for the deputy president post at his Parti Keadilan Rakyat. The contest is expected to be held tomorrow.

"Both are smart, intelligent, good track record, why is it going to divide the party?"

"The only solution is to have no contest and then I will follow the North Korean method," Mr Anwar quipped.

"If this is a democracy, you must tolerate differences; you must accept the fact that people will campaign," he added.

Mr Anwar is now set to take over from Dr Mahathir in about two years.

Asked what he plans to do when he becomes prime minister, Mr Anwar said, to laughter: "Make me PM first, lah. We settle one at a time."

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