

## **PKR in many minds over Anwar's Perak foray**

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ANALYSIS In recent general elections, Perak has not ignited much excitement. Not this time though, because on top of the sudden ouster of the state government following the 2008 polls, opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim will be in town.

But why and where? This article tries to shed some light on both questions.

Anwar, who is most likely on his final bid for premiership, could have taken the easy road and stayed put in Permatang Pauh, a parliamentary constituency in Penang mainland which has been his stomping ground for three decades.

He has been the elected representative there since 1982 - apart from the nine years when he was out in the cold battling sodomy and corruption charges - and there is little sign that the local folk will remove him any time soon.

But south of the state border, things are more uncertain.

In 2008, PAS, PKR and DAP formed the Perak government with a three-seat majority, but that government collapsed in just 11 months after three state assemblypersons quit the coalition and swore allegiance to the BN.

**Bolstering Malay support**

For Pakatan, although it is likely to have substantial backing from Chinese and Indian voters, recent surveys show its support among the Malays is eroding.

So in comes the calvary in the form of Anwar to show Malay voters that he is willing to take the bold step in leading the opposition charge in Perak and help reclaim the state.

Anwar's decision to help Pakatan bolster its Perak campaign should not come as a surprise, despite the accompanying risks.

Both DAP veteran Lim Kit Siang and PAS vice-president Salahuddin Ayub have left safe seats - in Perak and Kelantan, respectively - to face the uncertainties of new fronts in Johor.

While both Lim and Salahuddin are Johor-born, what link does Penang-born Anwar have to the silver state?

"I stayed nine years in Perak - seven years in Kuala Kangsar (Malay College Kuala Kangsar) and two years in Kamunting (ISA detention camp)," he quipped at a ceramah in Gerik last night.

Apart from helping to shore up Perak Pakatan, fielding Anwar in a seat currently held by the

BN will also provide a major morale boost for the opposition coalition and showcase some Pakatan fortitude.

Is Tg Malim the key?

This brings us to the question of where Anwar is likely to be fielded. PKR won three parliamentary seats in Perak - Gopeng, Sungai Siput and Bagan Serai - back in 2008 and lost in six other seats.

Last night, candidates for Pasir Salak (Mustafa Kamil Ayub), Lumut (Rear Admiral (Rtd) Imran Abdul Hamid) and Padang Rengas (Meor Ahmad Isharra Ishak) were announced by PKR, thus leaving Tanjung Malim, Tambun and Bagan Datok for Anwar.

Party insiders pointed out that Tanjung Malim, at least on paper, appears to be Anwar's best bet.

MCA's Ong Ka Chuan won the seat with a 5,422 majority (14.8 percent of votes cast) in 2008, but there appeared to be split voting in that contest.

Voting data suggests that Chinese voters were more likely to vote for Ong - who was facing a Malay opponent from PKR - at the parliament level, but were more likely to vote for either PKR or PAS at the state level.

Given that there are 41 percent non-Malay voters in Tanjung Malim, garnering the majority of the non-Malay vote and slightly less than half of the Malay vote should easily tide Anwar over.

Tough choices

Two other seats - Tambun and Bagan Datok - are considered a lot riskier for Anwar as both seats are currently held by caretaker Defence Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and caretaker Second Finance Minister Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah.

Both Bagan Datok and Tambun nevertheless appear winnable for PKR as the incumbents won the two seats with a slim majority - by 11.4 percent and 10.6 percent respectively in 2008.

Bagan Datok, a semi-rural mixed-race seat, has a high number of Indian voters (24 percent), whose voting patterns are harder to predict.

But again, there was split voting for the two state seats under Bagan Datok - Hutan Melintang and Rungkup - which when totalled, was in favour of Pakatan.

Pakatan won Hutan Melintang with a majority of 1,721 votes but lost Rungkup by 454 votes, giving it a total majority at the state level of 1,167 votes. However, it lost Bagan Datok by a 2,692-vote majority, suggesting a split of 3,859 votes between parliamentary and state levels.

If Pakatan can ensure that the votes it gets from the state seats in 2008 are truly reflected in the parliamentary contest, Anwar should stand a chance in defeating his former protege, Ahmad Zahid (left).

Meanwhile, Tambun is a Malay-majority urban seat in the eastern outskirts of Ipoh with an electorate that has shown steadfast support for Ahmad Husni for many years.

However, there were no signs of split voting in this seat.

It's do or die

Statistics aside, PKR would also have to consider the fact that Tan Yee Kew, a former MCA central committee member who joined the party in 2008, has also been making preparations to contest in Tanjung Malim.

Clearly, PKR strategists have plenty to mull over before they can pick a seat for Anwar.

Anwar will also have to consider that losing in Perak could spell a humiliating end to his political career and whether it is really worth leaving Permatang Pauh.

Today, the PKR supremo is scheduled for several stops in Permatang Pauh, where he is to soothe local supporters who object to him leaving.

Answers as to where he will head to, if at all, will likely be revealed tonight. Which seat will it be?

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