

**Permatang Pauh's favourite son 'returns'**  
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**Athi Veranggan**

Anwar Ibrahim has returned to contest his bastion, Permatang Pauh, not merely as a candidate, but as Pakatan Rakyat's nominee for prime minister.  
MCPX

In declaring this at a rally in Seberang Jaya last night, Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng reminded the people of Permatang Pauh that they had a "national duty to give a resounding mandate to the future premier".

anwar ibrahim talking in a ceramah at permatang pauh on sunday 030808The aim of the Permatang Pauh by-election was not merely for Anwar to earn his rightful place in Parliament, but "to secure the people's mandate to trigger a change in the nation's political governance," said Lim.

"Permatang Pauh constituents must give Anwar a big win to launch the Pakatan Rakyat crusade to topple Barisan Nasional and capture the federal administration.

"The victory road from Permatang Pauh should reach Putrajaya," the DAP secretary-general told a crowd of some 20,000 cheering people at the Seberang Jaya expo site.

In his speech earlier, Anwar said he had to win the forthcoming by-election to take over the federal administration and initiate urgent crucial changes to save the country from the crisis it was going through.

"The nation and people are suffering due to killer inflation, corruption, judiciary crisis, abuse of power and above all, misappropriation of the country's wealth by an elite few," he said at the rally, which kick-started his by-election campaign.

crowd of onlookers attending anwar ibrahim's ceramah in permatang pauh on sunday 030808Permatang Pauh has been an Anwar stronghold since the politician made his electoral debut there in the country's 6th general elections in 1982.

When he was sacked from the government in 1998 and subsequently jailed for six years, many thought it was the end of Anwar.

However, many Malaysians underestimated the opposition stalwart's feisty resilience.

When he was released in 2004 and became eligible to contest in elections after April 16 this year, Anwar was denied the chance to do so when the ruling BN called for the 12th general election on March 8.

Thus he had to force a by-election to become an elected lawmaker to regain what Lim described as "his rightful place in the August house as an elected representative".

Anwar's wife Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail held the fort since 1999, now paving the way for her husband's comeback.

## **'Take the money but vote for me'**

When interviewed, constituents at the rally predicted that Anwar would win comfortably, adding that the margin of victory would depend on whether his opponents succeed in manipulating the balloting process.

However, even if it was a 'dirty' election, many doubted Permatang Pauh's favourite son would lose, especially since his wife secured a big win merely five months ago.

Constituents, however, predicted that BN would not allow its arch enemy a walkover and that the coalition's entire machinery would be stationed in Permatang Pauh, galvanised to deny Anwar a victory or at least make his life difficult.

The opposition leader has said that "millions of ringgit would be thrown to catch votes. Take the money but vote for me".

BN is also expected to aggressively harp on the latest sodomy allegation by Anwar's former aide, Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan. How this allegation will influence voters remains to be seen.

A 71-year-old retired teacher, Noordin Umar, said although the allegation may have some impact, it would not decide the outcome of the by-election because people are more concerned about "political governance, inflation and corruption that affect their daily lives".

"Many people, including those in Permatang Pauh, want change at the centre and Anwar is the symbol of the drive for change," he said.

Even local BN leaders admit that the coalition faces a daunting task in defeating the PKR leader.

"Although he would face tremendous challenge and resistance from BN, Anwar will triumph in the end," conceded a BN leader.

Many leaders also said Anwar would be 'safe' in Permatang Pauh, which is in Pakatan Rakyat-ruled Penang.

The neighbouring Pakatan Rakyat governments of Perak and Kedah are also set to back Anwar all the way to the Parliament.

Permatang Pauh is sandwiched by six federal constituencies: five in Penang and one in Kedah, and ironically borders Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's Kepala Batas seat.

It's interesting that a by-election for the Opposition's prime-minister designate will take place at the doorstep of the incumbent premier.

## **Politically explosive state**

"It propels the perennially opposition-minded Penang as a politically explosive state," said Bukit Bendera MP Liew Chin Tong.

permatang pauh election results 310708Whether or not Anwar finds it tough, said a local BN component party leader, would depend on who BN picks as candidate.

"A strong local man would have a chance. Otherwise, BN should forget it," said the leader. However, at the moment, no one in state Umno seems keen to contest, although the names of former Anwar supporter Ezam Mohd Nor, Permatang Pauh Umno chief Abdul Jalil Abdul Majid and former Anwar loyalist Ahmad Saad have cropped up.

PKR state election director Mustafa Kamal Mohd Yusoff has even cheekily suggested that BN field former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Not since the arrival of DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang in 1986 to contest in this industrialised island-state has an individual electoral crusade generated so much political buzz.

But the individual this time around is no ordinary man.

It is Anwar Ibrahim, whom even his critics would want back in Parliament, firing his trademark salvos.

But first, Permatang Pauh must be obliged to heed the call.

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