

It's make or break for PKR leader
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Undaunted by serious new charges of sodomy, which he says is a frame-up, opposition icon Anwar Ibrahim is making a bid to return to parliament in a by-election that he calls the final battle for a 'New Malaysia' sans racial discrimination.
MCPX

This is not an ordinary by-election but a battle between the old corrupt order and the new Malaysia without race, without discrimination and with equality and justice for all citizens," he told supporters at a rally last week, referring to the upcoming battle in Permatang Pauh, a family stronghold in Penang.

Dr Tan Yew Kee former MCA Klang Wanita joins PKR Anwar Ibrahim event 030808 05 Anwar will face the government juggernaut in a constituency created when incumbent representative Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, Anwar's wife and president of PKR, vacated the seat on Aug 1 to pave the way for the contest.

The result will make or break his career, political analysts told IPS.

The Election Commission has today fixed nomination and polling dates on Aug 16 and Aug 26 respectively.

"The contest is arguably a major turning point in the progress of our society towards equality, justice and democracy," said Wong Chin Huat, political scientist with the Monash University Kuala Lumpur.

"Anwar is expected to win handsomely but everyone will be watching how big his winning majority would be because that would indicate how well his agenda for change is accepted by the voters," said Wong.

Increasingly, the by-election is being seen as a battle between Anwar's 'cosmopolitanism and inclusive social and political philosophy' versus the racial ideology of Umno and the Barisan Nasional coalition it leads.

Heavy campaigning has already started with both sides hurling accusations at each other.

'Betray Malay interests'

Umno is playing on fears that Anwar will betray Malay interests by overturning the New Economic Policy that gives preferential treatment to Malays in business and education.

"Anwar is an ambitious person who is willing to give up everything holy to Malays just to become prime minister," said Ezam Mohd Nor, a former Anwar aide who has since defected to Umno.

Anwar has said that the new sodomy charge, like the 1998 case, is a frame-up by authorities to derail his campaign to topple the government via inducing defections among ruling party backbenchers.

Anwar first won the constituency as a ruling party representative in 1982. Over successive years, he always fought there and won easily until his 1998 arrest and jailing.

wan azizah interview about her resignation as mp for permatang pauh 010808 02 Thereafter his wife, at the head of the opposition, retained it successively in 1999, 2004 and in the March 8 general elections which saw the opposition making substantial gains, winning five state governments and 82 seats in the 222-seat parliament.

Anwar has assured supporters that a change of government will happen before Sept 16, a promise political insiders say is hard to keep but ensures that his supporters stay upbeat.

"We expect the sodomy allegation to be a key issue in the by-election," a political analyst said. "Anwar has bravely decided to face the people and put the question before them and let the people decide his guilt or innocence by the outcome of the results."

Anwar says a victory for him will further his ambition to return to parliament, engineer defections and topple the government and become prime minister.

"I need to be prime minister to begin implementing the real reforms that the country urgently needs," he said, rejecting as 'sham' measures Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi is trying to push through to clean up the judiciary and the police force in the face of opposition from his own cabinet colleagues.

umno special briefing abdullah ahmad badawi announce resignation date 100708 05 Abdullah insists that 'corrupting and buying' of government backbenchers is immoral and the worst kind of corruption, and has warned his rival that it is a serious offence to bribe lawmakers to switch sides.

Anwar dismisses the allegations, saying the legislators are crossing the floor out of respect for his reform agenda.

Abdullah believes that his programme to reform society, curb corruption and promote transparency and accountability is firm, gradual and steady and that any 'grab for power' will destabilise the country, cause public fear and drive away foreign investors.

'Save' the country

Anwar counters by saying that Abdullah's reforms have stalled and a new vision and a new political and economic agenda were needed to 'save' the country.

permatang pauh past election results 060808 "We have never been this bad before," Anwar said in a campaign speech on Sunday. "The economy is without direction and the world is laughing at us. The world knows how low we have fallen."

Anwar, a former deputy prime minister until he was sacked and jailed on charges of corruption and sodomy- later rejected by a court - also refutes claims that he was contesting the by-election to escape the new sodomy allegations made by an aide.

The police have completed investigations and a decision is pending by the attorney-general whether to charge Anwar with sodomy, a serious offence under archaic laws with 20 years in jail and whipping, or drop the case.

"I am being victimised because I dare to stand up for the people and expose corruption. Because I am seen as challenging the corrupt system," Anwar said.

Political veterans say the voters of Permatang Pauh have a historic opportunity to influence the national political landscape.

"The election is not about an individual and a constituency but about the future of the Malaysian people and nation," said veteran opposition lawmaker Lim Kit Siang.

"The outcome will have special import in shaping the development of the Malaysian political landscape," Lim told IPS.

"The voters in Permatang Pauh have to speak up for the people of Malaysia to express their disgust at the worsening political, economic and nation-building crisis and send a clear and unmistakable message that the people have lost confidence in the national leadership."

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