

Lower turnout expected, Penang mulls public holiday

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While the opposition Pakatan Rakyat coalition is unhappy with the Election Commission's decision to hold the Permatang Pauh by-election on a working day, it has shot down the idea of the Penang government declaring the vote a public holiday.

MCPX

The state government, which is controlled by Pakatan, has the powers to gazette the Aug 26 polling day a public holiday.

anwar ibrahim exclusive pre permatang pauh interview 130808 02"I had discussions with Chief Minister (Lim) Guan Eng, but we're not in favour of declaring a public holiday..." PKR leader Anwar Ibrahim told Malaysiakini in an exclusive interview on Wednesday just before he left for Penang to kick off his by-election campaign.

According to Anwar, calling a public holiday would send the wrong signal to investors.

However, the Permatang Pauh candidate did not mince his words in lambasting the Election Commission for holding the by-election on a Tuesday.

"To me, it is not only unfortunate but irresponsible on the part of the Election Commission to conduct elections knowing that the most of them (voters), particularly the (state) constituency of Seberang Jaya ... are factory workers.

"Not only Seberang Jaya, up to Bayan Baru and Bagan. Which means that they have to take a half a day off, which is very difficult."

PKR Youth plans to send letters to factory owners and management asking them to give workers time-off to vote on Aug 26.

"You're a factory worker in Kulim (in neighbouring Kedah) - what do you do? Unless you're given almost a day off, you are not able to vote. You can't come back in two hours - back and forth. You can't."

Anwar slammed the EC's move as an attempt to slash the voter turnout in the crucial by-election.

As such, the opposition leader would not be drawn into the debate on whether he would win with a bigger majority than the 13,398 obtained by his wife, Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, at the general election five months ago.

anwar ibrahim penang kg kota permatang pauh by election campaign 140808 09"I hope to win comfortably, but I'm not too particular about the numbers because I know I am against the entire machinery - (the) federal government machinery and the party..."

Wan Azizah, a two-term MP for the seat, resigned two weeks ago to force a by-election in the bid to pave the way for Anwar to return to Parliament after a 10-year absence.

Anwar, whose five-year ban in active politics expired in April, had held the seat for 17 years

since he wrested Permatang Pauh from PAS in 1982.

Not the toughest, but challenging polls

Interestingly, he did not see the upcoming by-election as his toughest electoral outing in his long political career.

He considered his 1982 bid, where he was given the task as a fresh face to unseat the incumbent, as his most difficult mission.

Yet Permatang Pauh in 2008 will be particularly challenging for the PKR leader as the ruling Barisan Nasional will pull out all stops to kill his comeback bid.

"I'm not underestimating their strength in terms of money - I think hundreds of millions of ringgit will be poured - and their dirty tactics in terms of malicious, scurrilous attacks, and also the use of the government resources, even intimidation..."

"I cannot imagine RM218 million in 2004 (elections) just on posters and banners by the federal, not yet for the (party) divisions and the states. We are talking about hundreds of millions of ringgit," he said, referring to a Malaysiakini report that a court had ordered Umno to settle the astounding bills with a poll merchandise supplier.

anwar ibrahim penang kg kota permatang pauh by election campaign 140808 07While most political pundits expect Anwar to score an easy victory, the opposition candidate is not going to let it lure him into complacency.

This will be the first time since 1982 that Anwar will be camping out in Permatang Pauh throughout the 10-day campaigning period.

"I'm not taking this for granted, I'm appealing to my supporters, my friends, work very hard to meet every single constituent, and I'll try to cover as many places as possible."

He also expects the campaign to be dirty, especially after he was charged for sodomy last week following a police report lodged by a former aide.

But he intends to meet the allegations head-on. "I think instead of being apologetic or defensive, you should go on the charge."