

BN hoping for a miraculous feat with Arif
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Short and chubby he may be, but Arif Shah Omar Shah stands tall - in Permatang Pauh politics.
MCPX

The 52-year-old politician may not be a household name nationally, but in his turf he is known and liked enough to possibly edge past his more globally recognisable opponent - Anwar Ibrahim.

The Seberang Jaya state assemblyperson Arif Shah was chosen ahead of Permatang Pauh Umno chief Abdul Jalil Abdul Majid, former division deputy chief Ahmad Saad, former National Mosque Imam and 2008 candidate Pirdaus Ismail and state Umno treasurer Zainal Abidin Osman

arif shah omar shah bn umno candidate for permatang pauh by election 140808 13A win by Arif Shah will stop on its track all the momentum from the March 8 general election result and force a serious rethink in the Pakatan Rakyat strategy to control Parliament at the next general election - let alone by Sep 16 this year.

Arif Shah's state seat is one of the three under the Permatang Pauh parliamentary seat. The other two being Permatang Pasir and Penanti.

The Mandarin and Hokkien speaking Umno man was picked because his party felt "he has the charisma, clean personality and multi-racial outlook to defeat Anwar."

His service orientation along with the above observations are seen to explain why he was the only Umno candidate to prevail in the March polls inside Permatang Pauh.

The by-election nomination is this Saturday and polling is on Tuesday Aug 26.

Litmus test

The Permatang Pauh by-election is a litmus test for both Anwar and premier Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's ruling coalition.

BN is mobilising at least 5,000 campaign workers for what is surely going to be a feisty campaign period.

Whisper campaigns have started telling "even if Anwar wins, he will be convicted with sodomy and jailed forever", a tactic that might confuse fence-sitters, estimated at 20 per cent of 58,459 registered voters.

anwar ibrahim and arif shah omar shah candidate for permatang pauh by election 140808
Countering, the PKR de facto leader has forewarned rally crowds that he would be "hammered, humiliated, insulted and smeared."

He repeats his innocence in the face of sodomy charges, and appears confident of victory in court.

It is likelier the sodomy allegations will have some influence in more rural Permatang Pasir - 20,450 registered voters consisting 14,850 Malays, 5,247 Chinese and 250 Indians, PAS controlled since 1999.

Less so in Penanti, a rural-urban mixed constituency shows 15,421 voters, including 11,296 Malays, 3,732 Chinese, and 371 Indians, and its state representative is PKR's Deputy Chief Minister I Mohammad Fairus Khairuddin.

Stiffest competition is expected in the final third of Seberang Jaya for obvious reasons. Arif would expect to translate his state assembly seat votes to Parliamentary votes from the 22,680 voters broken to 14,480 Malays, 5,381 Chinese, 2,769 Indians and 54 others - and beat Anwar there.

Or maybe not.

Urban non-Malay voters in Penang are notorious for 'vote-splitting' - dividing their state and federal votes to BN and opposition in either order - and not give one coalition both votes. So voting for Arif as an assembly person might mean not voting him as their Parliamentarian.

Permatang Pauh voters consist some 40 percent aged between 21 and 40, 25.3 per cent aged between 41 and 50, about 18.6 per cent aged 51 to 60 and 16 per cent above 60.

With more than 66 percent of voters below fifty, the wave of reform and change is more attractive to this group. They are more cyber savvy and cognisant of both mass and alternative media - making them decisive.

BN would have more than an even tilt at those above sixty, and might come out tops there.

Women make up 50.61 per cent more than men at 49.39 per cent. The Umno's wanita and puteri wing are the real king-makers in by-elections as they are likelier to make the rounds to housewives and professional women.

This semi-urban constituency's 69 per cent Malay voters are probably divided in supporting PKR, PAS or Umno. The key fence-sitters are the 25 percent Chinese and 6 percent Indians.

Division election

Umno leaders are painfully aware of the factionalism at the Permatang Pauh division in the lead up to its election.

permatang pauh 2008 results for state and state seats 140808Some 48 of the division's 91 branches have held their annual general meeting (AGM) recently and their nominations for the division chairperson post are split between Pirdaus with 19, Abdul Jalil 16, Arif Shah 14 and followed by Ahmad with five.

If Arif Shah wins the parliamentary seat, he stands a good chance of being the next division chief - which is not to the liking of Abdul Jalil and Pirdaus.

Eyes are on the two and what they might say or do to affect the 19,000 Umno members in the electoral roll.

Arif Shah however last night announced that he would not contest the post of division head if he wins the by-election.

"If I win the by-election, I wish to share power as the elected representative with the Umno leadership," he was reported as saying by Bernama today.

Fence-sitters

MCA, Gerakan and MIC despite losing all contests in Penang in March might still have a say with the fence-sitters.

The recent developments- the UiTM controversy and Bar Council forum - have irked non-Malay voters, a MIC leader said.

Civil societies - Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) in particular will get into the mix move votes the Pakatan way.

"Even if BN was right that Anwar would 'play us out', we will vote for him because he can be voted out in the next election," said a Chinese motorcycle retailer.

An Indian salesman quipped, "he should have been in the Parliament by now as the opposition leader if not for the government."

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