

Permatang Pauh : it's a three-way fight
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It is not going to be a straight fight between PKR and Barisan Nasional for the Permatang Pauh by-election on Aug 26. In fact, it will be a three-cornered fight.
MCPX

It could have been a four-cornered fight but PKR 'spare tyre' Dr Mansor Othman pulled out of the race after the objection period.

permatang pauh by election nomination day 160808 39His candidacy was part of a PKR contingency plan in the event of PKR candidate Anwar Ibrahim's nomination being rejected.

At 11.45am, returning officer Roslan Yahaya announced the three eligible candidates as BN's Arif Shah Omar Shah, Anwar and Hanafi Hamat, the president of PAS splinter party Angkatan Keadilan Insan Malaysia (Akim).

"The Election Commission (EC) has received five objections but they have been ruled as invalid," Roslan told a 15,000-strong crowd of supporters gathered since about 7am, without disclosing the grounds of the objections.

BN supporters, estimated at about 5,000, were clearly outnumbered by the 10,000-strong supporters of PKR and its Pakatan Rakyat allies, DAP and PAS. Outside the field where the supporters of both sides have gathered, there were a few thousands more of opposition supporters.

In his announcement, the returning officer also said Hanafi's name will appear first on the ballot paper, to be followed by Anwar and Arif Shah.

The completion of the nomination today paved the way for a 10-day election campaign, with polling fixed for Aug 26.

Anwar looks a sure bet

As it stands now, Anwar, 61, looks a sure bet to win this seat which was vacated by his wife Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail on July 31. It was a move to get Anwar back into Parliament after an absence of 10 years.

permatang pauh by election nomination day 160808 27His most potent challenger is still BN's Arif Shah, who is a local man just like Anwar, as well as the incumbent Seberang Jaya state representative. Seberang Jaya is one of the three state seats under the Permatang Pauh parliamentary constituency.

Senior to Arif Shah by 10 years, Anwar was the Permatang Pauh Umno division chief at the time the former was its youth chief.

Anwar was sacked from Umno and the government in 1998 and was subsequently charged and convicted on corruption and sodomy charges. He was released in 2004 and his political ban expired last April.

Speaking to reporters after the nomination, Arif Shah quipped that his third position on the ballot paper gave him an edge over his two opponents.

"The number 'three' means mountain in Mandarin and that would mean we are up on the hill. Alhamdulillah (praise to God), I will wrest back Permatang Pauh," he said.

permatang pauh by election nomination day 160808 11 hanafi hamat akim candidate

The third candidate, Hanafi, 61, (right) who had hinted on his intention to contest, arrived at the nomination centre at about 9.20am with just two persons - his proposer and seconder.

Saying he was neither pro-Umno nor PKR, Hanafi said his purpose of joining the race was not to split the votes.

Arif Shah was the first to submit his nomination form.

Dressed in a yellow baju Melayu, he was accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to the nomination centre at Dewan Aminuddin Baki of the Tuanku Bainun Teaching Institute.

He submitted his nomination papers as soon as the centre opened at 9am.

Mansor, an insurance policy

He was followed by Anwar who wore a light blue baju Melayu, similar to his party colour. The opposition icon once again exuded confidence in winning the seat as he entered the nomination centre at about 9.05am.

The former deputy premier looked cheerful in the presence of his wife, their six children, Pakatan leaders and thousands of his supporters.

permatang pauh by election nomination day 160808 06 "I feel good," Anwar replied when asked by Malaysiakini how he felt about contesting again after 10 years in hiatus.

The PKR leader, who initially said he would call a press conference after the nomination, was whisked away by supporters and aides as soon as the nomination was over and did not speak to the media.

A surprise came at about 9.30am when the media learnt that PKR's Penang-based leader, Mansor, would also enter the contest, paving way for a four-cornered fight.

PKR leaders including Anwar and vice-president Azmin Ali appeared tight-lipped at the time, refusing to comment on the matter, drawing speculation of an internal party split.

However, soon after, the media learnt that it was a mere tactical move on PKR's part.

permatang pauh by election nomination day 160808 29 Met later, Mansor confirmed his candidacy was just a strategy to prevent BN a walkover in the event that Anwar's eligibility to contest is denied.

"I was just an insurance cover for my boss and on stand-by if he is disqualified. Since he is not

disqualified, therefore I'm withdrawing," said Mansor.

Also present was PAS' spiritual leader Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, who despite being unwell still insisted on being there.

Other leaders who were present including DAP's Lim Guan Eng, Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh, PKR's Abdul Khalid Ibrahim, as well as PAS' Husam Musa and Dr Hatta Ramli.

However, a notable absence from the opposition line-up was PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang.

No contact between Anwar, Najib

BN too had a strong presence.

Seen lending their support today were Gerakan acting president Dr Koh Tsu Koon, who is also Penang BN chairperson, MIC president S Samy Vellu, MCA vice-president Ong Tee Keat, BN Youth chief Hishammuddin Hussein, Wanita Umno vice-head Shahrizat Jalil and Umno information head Muhammad Muhamad Taib.pematang pauh by election nomination day 160808 02

Also spotted at the nomination centre was ex-PKR Youth chief Ezam Mohd Noor, who has since joined Umno.

Ezam, who had previously stated his readiness to contest against Anwar, welcomed Umno's decision to pick Arif Shah as candidate, saying the latter's background was a "plus point" for the ruling coalition.

Meanwhile, when asked about BN's lower supporter turnout today compared to PKR's, Umno's Muhamad said the two parties' strength in the election could not be measured by the crowd.

"It was merely a show for their party," said Muhammad.

Despite being at the same place, Anwar and Najib did not meet each other as different routes were designated to BN and PKR.

Anwar has launched a series of scathing salvos against Najib since last year especially over the murder of a Mongolian woman and several defence deals.

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