

Huge turnout as Anwar launches comeback bid
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A huge crowd cheered opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim today as he registered for a by-election to return him to Parliament, the next step in his plan to become prime minister.
MCPX

The Aug 26 ballot in Anwar's home state of Penang is also seen as a test of his popularity after a young male aide accused him of sodomy - the same charge that saw him jailed a decade ago.

permatang pauh by election nomination day 160808 27"I am touched by the support. This is an overwhelming support," Anwar said as he arrived at the nomination centre in the Permatang Pauh constituency, which was locked down by barricades and an armed security presence.

Some 15,000 supporters shouted Anwar's battle cry of "reformasi" or "reform", and waved party flags, facing off against 5,000 government supporters and trading taunts and insults.

At least 3,000 police including the riot squad were deployed to keep the peace and a police helicopter hovered overhead.

"We want change. The future is Anwar. Long live Anwar!" chanted supporters of the opposition leader, a former deputy premier who was sacked in 1998 and convicted on a sodomy charge that was later overturned.

BN contesting as underdog

permatang pauh past election results 060808Anwar, 61, has said the sodomy allegations have been fabricated to prevent him from ousting the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, after March elections that handed the opposition alliance a third of parliamentary seats.

He was formally charged earlier this month, a day after his wife vacated the Permatang Pauh constituency - which she has held since he went to jail - to allow him to return to Parliament after a decade-long absence.

The coalition has fielded a little-known candidate for the by-election and is gloomy about its chances.

"Barisan Nasional is contesting as an underdog. We will continue to work hard. This will be an uphill task. But it is not impossible," said Deputy Premier Najib Razak who attended the nomination day.

The government candidate, Arif Shah Omar Shah, speaks Mandarin and the local Hokkien dialect which is a plus in the multiracial seat, but is nevertheless unlikely to win the seat which Anwar held from 1982-1999.

In a racial breakdown that broadly mirrors the national population, more than two-thirds of voters in Permatang Pauh are Muslim Malays, alongside Chinese who make up 26 percent and Indians at six percent.

Anwar has said he is still pursuing his plan to wrest power within months, with the help of government defectors, despite the looming sodomy trial.

A government plot

Yesterday, Anwar's accuser Mohamad Saiful Bukhari Azlan, a 23-year-old former volunteer in the opposition leader's office, visited a mosque to swear he was telling the truth and challenged Anwar to do the same.

saiful bukhari azlan and anwar ibrahim sodomy 2 pc 150808 05He also said he was sodomised against his will, although when Anwar was formally accused in court the charge indicated the alleged sex act was consensual.

Anwar said at a rally last night that Saiful's action was part of the government plot.

"They are afraid of me being an MP and going on to become the opposition leader in parliament," he said.

Sodomy is a serious offence in Malaysia and carries a penalty of 20 years' imprisonment.

Sarimah Ali, a 33-year-old teacher who was among the huge crowd of Anwar supporters, said the renewed allegations were of no concern.

"Nobody believes Saiful. His swearing in the mosque yesterday makes it more clear that it's a government conspiracy to bring down Anwar," he said.

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