

Permatang Pauh is Anwar's to take
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If Saturday's crowd size at the nomination centre decides who will win the Permatang Pauh by-election, then PKR candidate Anwar Ibrahim is already on his way to Parliament.

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permatang pauh by election nomination day 160808 28A mammoth 15,000 (PKR insists its closer to 60,000) flag-waving Pakatan Rakyat supporters swarmed the nomination centre in Bukit Mertajam's Tunku Bainun Teachers College last Saturday.

The paltry 5,000 Barisan Nasional supporters were largely muted by the carnival atmosphere.

All political observers and even top BN leaders have concurred that Anwar is the overwhelming favourite.

BN leaders rated the battle as 60-40, while several observers suggest it is 70-30, in Anwar's favour.

Even bookies are getting into the act, taking bets on a 10,000 to 15,000 majority win for the Pakatan de facto leader. Reliable intelligence places the lead at 18,000-vote majority.

anwar ibrahim seberang jaya market permatang pauh by election visit 180808 01However neither Pakatan nor Anwar are taking things for granted - not when facing the might of the BN election machinery.

The election has been tagged as the 'mother of all by-elections'.

Penang Chief Minister and DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng has forewarned, "Jangan menang sorak kampung tergadai (cheerleading does not guarantee victory)."

The 61-year-old Anwar faces a tough battle against BN candidate Arif Shah Arif Omar, 52, and Angkatan Keadilan Insan Malaysia (Akim) president Hanafi Hamat, 61.

The constituents

Permatang Pauh, a semi-urban constituency in Penang, has 58,459 voters, consisting some 69 percent Malays, 25 percent Chinese and six per cent Indians.

The parliamentary seat has three state seats consisting the urbanised Seberang Jaya, rural Permatang Pasir and semi-urban Penanti.

permatang pauh past election results 060808Most Malays are scattered in the villages dotting the landscape while some live in the newer townships which have sprouted in Seberang Jaya, the cosmopolitan centre of the constituency.

Chinese largely run businesses such as restaurants, market stalls and sundry shops in the Seberang Jaya, Penanti, Permatang Pauh and Bukit Mertajam towns.

Most of the businesses are run by the older generation, while the younger folk work in the hundreds of multinational companies in Perai.

Indians mostly live in Seberang Jaya and working in the nearby industrial parks, while some stay in rubber and oil palm estates in Penanti.

The campaign for support is being done in contrasting styles.

Since released from prison, Anwar has played up a more multiracial and inclusive policy and strategy, which yielded high returns in the last general elections. He is still pursuing this policy for the by-election.

Umno have stuck to the their tried and tested methods of relying on communal politics.

Their leaders are playing up the controversy which followed Selangor Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim's suggestions of 10 percent non-Malays entry into Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM).

Emphasised also is the BN candidate Arif Shah's proficiency in Mandarin and Hokkien.

A Chinese professional in the area said the language strategy was an insult to the community and revealed the coalition's shortcomings.

"It is as if Chinese are only interested in sectarian issues not the bigger national goals," said a voter.

Superstar political actor

Arif Shah is also asking the voters to decide between him - a full-time hardworking service-orientated elected representative - and his former mentor Anwar, a superstar political actor.

arif shah omar shah bn candidate permatang pauh 180808The BN candidate himself sees the contest 45-55 in favour of Anwar, and his camp acknowledges that they were fighting a losing battle.

The third bullet in BN's arsenal - other than the the UiTM controversy and language know-how - is the ongoing sodomy charge against Anwar, which has had minimal affect on the campaign so far.

Feelings on the ground suggest that more people are convinced Anwar is a victim of a political conspiracy - which has led to some leaders not wanting to harp on the criminal case.

Gerakan leaders like Dr Toh Kin Woon have come out openly to support Anwar's campaign. Fellow party members Tan Lian Hoe and Chan Ko Youn have asked the the party to pull out from BN. This is embarrassing for the coalition since acting party president Dr Koh Tsu Koon is the state BN chief.

A top BN leader summed the situation well.

"Realistically we are working to reduce Anwar's majority to score a morale victory."

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