

Permatang Pauh : fights shifts into higher gear
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Leaders of the two main contesting parties in the Permatang Pauh by-election, Najib Abdul Razak and Anwar Ibrahim, may have toned down the rhetoric, but their supporters are shifting into higher gear, with one camp using the taboo 'babi' word and the other raising giant posters of a controversially murdered Mongolian woman.

MCPX

permatang pauh 200808 temple function najib Take Deputy Prime Minister Najib, the man calling the shots for the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition's campaign. He was an hour late to a 'meet-the-people' session with the Chinese community at a temple in Kampung Sungai Lembu last night.

Najib, delayed by a cabinet committee meeting, took the mike as soon as he arrived, speaking to the 200-odd Chinese villagers who waited for him on the issue closest to their hearts - vernacular education.

He told them of his struggle, when he was education minister, to get the Education Act amended in 1996 so that Chinese schools could be recognised as part of the national education system.

The silvered-haired deputy premier hardly made any reference to archrival Anwar, except to chide him for not doing more for Chinese schools, when the latter was education minister and later deputy prime minister like him.

anwar pasar malam walkabout 200808 03 Anwar, in the same ruling coalition as Najib until his controversial sacking in 1998, is now the de facto leader of the Pakatan Rakyat opposition alliance.

He is fighting not only BN candidate Arif Shah Omar Shah for the Permatang Pauh parliamentary seat, but also challenging Najib for the country's number one job - the coveted premiership.

Under a succession pact made with Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Najib is due to take over the top post in 2010. But Anwar, whose Pakatan alliance holds 82 of the 222 seats in Parliament, has promised to reverse that majority and form a new government by Sept 16.

'Babi' cabinet

Despite Najib' soft peddle, BN supporters have been working feverishly round the clock distributing thousands of leaflets.

Some of these have portrayed Anwar as a traitor, a 'Chinese agent' who 'sold out' his own community by allying himself with the multiracial DAP party and calling for the abolition of the New Economic Policy, an affirmative action plan that favours the Malays.

But it is the latest 12-page bulletin, an anonymous publication, circulating in the constituency that has created an uproar. The bulletin has labelled Anwar's new government line-up, if he

succeeds in taking power, as a 'cabinet Barisan Anwar bin Ibrahim (babi)'.

The word 'babi', which means pig, is highly offensive to Muslims.

In the other corner, Anwar and his supporters have also been working non-stop holding nightly ceramahs and making door-to-door visits.

The 61-year old leader has so far spoken mostly about his vision, discussing issues on the economy, security and equal treatments to all communities with his audiences.

Even so, he was stung by the BN's use of the sodomy charges brought against him by his former aide Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan, warning he would expose Najib's secrets if the personal attacks continued.

anwar pasar malam walkabout 200808 umno big screen"Enough is enough. Stop the scornful lies on me," Anwar warned in a rare outburst last night.

Wielded by the BN as their main weapon against him, the ruling coalition has busy been showing video clips of the handsome 23-year-old Saiful swearing on the Quran that he had indeed been sodomised by his ex-boss (photo).

Giant posters of Altantuya appear

Supporters from Anwar's camp have not been slow to retaliate.

Giant black-and-white banners featuring the face of murdered Mongolian national Altantuya Shaariibuu have been planted prominent spots in the constituency.

A whisper campaign of corruption in large defence deals transacted during Najib's tenure as defence minister is also making the rounds.

permatang pauh by election posters and banners 190808 02 Najib has been accused of being involved in the gristly Altantuya murder case, which has shocked the nation with its ramifications of large commissions paid for submarine deals and a sex scandal.

Anwar, regarded as a hero by his supporters for uniting and leading the opposition to its biggest haul in the March polls, was sacked by ex-premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1998 and jailed for sodomy and corruption charges he says were framed by his political enemies.

He was released in 2004 and the sodomy charges were later overturned by the courts. Anwar has pleaded not guilty to the latest charges of sodomy, claiming a conspiracy to stop him from taking power and forming a new government by the middle of next month.

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