

**Permatang Pauh enters the final lap**  
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**Beh Lih Yi**

Anwar Ibrahim has been scouring Permatang Pauh since nomination day (last Saturday) with a team of newly-hired bodyguards - bearing strong resemblance to elite police officers, or UTK.  
MCPX

anwar ibrahim ceramah in tok kandu permatang pauh by election 220808 06The PKR candidate travels in a convoy with bodyguards - all clad in smart black uniform and sunglasses - who follow him, his wife or daughters with equal attention.

Anwar looks set to be the prime minister, said some people. While that ambitious plan remains uncertain - sentiments on the ground clearly indicate that he is on his way back to Parliament to represent the semi-urban seat after a 10 year exodus.

With the first-half of the 10-day campaign over, Anwar seems to be ahead of his main rival Barisan Nasional candidate Arif Shah Omar Shah and third candidate, Hanafi Hamat of PAS' splinter party Akim.

The past six days saw the contrast between Arif Shah's 'service-oriented elected representative' and Anwar's 'future premier' sound-bites.

BN - especially Arif Shah himself who is the two-term Seberang Jaya state assemblyperson - has on the campaign trail asked voters to reject the Kuala Lumpur-based Anwar as his ability to serve the locality once elected was suspect.

Leveraging on his ability to speak Mandarin and the local dialect Hokkien, the BN candidate has concentrated his campaigning - making his walkabout and house-to-house calls - in Chinese areas.

The affable BN politician relies less on ceramah unlike his opponent, and he uses Sun Tzu's Art of War to explain why - "one should not use the same tactic of which his enemy is good at."

### **Chinese, Indian votes**

Ong Lian Hong, a 53-year-old hawker from Seberang Jaya was impressed by Arif Shah's personal touch and his ability to help solve problems of the average voter.

arif shah bn candidate permatang pauh by election walkabout 210808 05"He is a friendly politician and he has been consistently paying attention to the problems affecting us such as ventilation issues in this hawker centre," he said.

Winning substantial Chinese votes, totaling at 24.5 percent and the six percent Indian votes in this constituency of 58,459 electorates remains an uphill task for BN.

The two communities are partial to PKR, which was the case in the previous election in March - won by party president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, the present candidate's wife.

The spirit of March's political tsunami is widely felt, judging by the loud applause and the shouts of 'makkal sakti' (people's power) from Chinese and Indian audiences at Anwar's ceramah, striking contrast to the more lukewarm response from Malay crowds at times.

BN's ability to win the Chinese might be compromised by the rather muted efforts of both Chinese parties in the coalition so far.

MCA president Ong Ka Ting is expected here for the first time to campaign, while Gerakan - the party that ran Penang for almost 38 years - has its acting president tangled up in a midweek debate with present state Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng.

On top of this, Gerakan's grassroots have been asking for the party's pull-out from the coalition in response to Umno's leadership, and stalwart Dr Toh Kin Woon has resigned after meeting Anwar.

At the same time, there is potential backlash from non-Malay voters over BN's incessant harping on Anwar's call for the abolition of the New Economic Policy, the affirmative action policy championed by BN and bumiputera inclined.

As for the Indian community, hundreds of the influential Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) supporters from across the country have pledged to campaign for Anwar this weekend, giving the PKR candidate an extra boost.

A significant number of Anwar's local based election workers are Indians, a barometer of the Pakatan leader's support from the community.

### **'Malay future?'**

The second half will veer towards the battle for Malay votes, and for PKR to help sustain or better build on the 81 percent voter turnout during the general election in March.

BN is expected to focus on the Malay heartlands of Penanti and Permatang Pasir - which has heavy PKR influence- in the final four days of the election campaign.

Malay voters stand at 69.4 percent overall.

From day one, BN's campaign in Malay villages has been about Anwar who is selling out his own race in exchange for fair treatment of all communities - at the expense of Malays, claim Umno leaders.

The charges are made by BN top guns themselves and returning ex-PKR leaders - not by Arif Shah.

anwar ibrahim ceramah in tok kandu permatang pauh by election 220808 03Tepid applause at Anwar's ceramah in the more traditional Malay villages, as compared to the overwhelming responses in urbanised areas, suggest that BN's race card has some effect on the Malay electorate.

"The Malays are worried about what will happen to us if BN loses (federal power), the Malays keep asking themselves this question," said a PAS supporter when met at a Anwar's ceramah last night.

BN is expected to work this sentiment and fear to canvas votes in the Malay zones.

ezam mohd nor bn permatang pauh by election campaign 220808 02Anwar's ex-close allies like Ezam Mohd Nor and KS Nallakaruppan have been speaking out against the PKR supremo, attacking him for not practising what he preached and creating confusion among Malay voters on who is the 'real' Anwar.

On another front BN has consistently played up the sodomy allegation Anwar faces from his 23-year-old ex-aide Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan. They also question why Anwar refused to make a religious oath.

The sodomy stories may sway some older Malays voters, but the presence of influential religious figures like PAS' Abdul Hadi Awang and Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat over the weekend will help win back some ground.

Any losses in the sodomy quagmire may be made back by fence-sitters who will go for the former deputy prime minister to get him back to Parliament and launch his premiership challenge.

For the record however, Arif Shah has said he is confident of winning the seat with a slim majority.

### **'Sacrifice for change'**

The question on everyone's lip is what will be Anwar's winning majority?

An internal party analysis has indicated in the 'worst case scenario', PKR's majority of 13,398 may sink to between 3,000 and 5,000 votes - if there is a fall of 10 percent Malay voters' support and eight percent of their turnout.

In the March election, Malay voters' turnout stood at 83 percent, of which 60 percent of the votes went to PKR and the remaining to Umno. The party believed the Chinese and Indian voters' support will remain more or less the same at 70 and 65 percent respectively.

PKR strategist Saifuddin Nasution Ismail conceded that the biggest problem faced is in overcoming the possible low turnout due to polling day being a work day.

anwar ibrahim ceramah in permatang pauh by election 220808 01Anticipating that, he said the party is preparing buses to ferry voters from the factories located mostly in the neighbouring Prai and Kulim.

The other problem is complacency, with victory a seemingly foregone conclusion many Anwar voters may not turn up to vote on Tuesday.

The PKR ceramah now have started to call on voters to turn up and get the maximum number of votes for Anwar, otherwise BN might claim a moral victory.

The plea from Anwar to a 2,000-odd crowd at a ceramah last night showed how seriously he weighed the turnout issue.

"Even if you have to take leave to cast the vote, please make that little sacrifice for the

future of our children to save the country," the PKR leader implored.

Whatever it is, Permatang Pauh will be abuzz with full-day campaigning activities of BN and PKR this weekend.

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