

**The conjuror weaves his verbal wand**  
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Ascending the ladder of political leadership to its apex, according to the theory that proposes, say, Abdullah Badawi as an example, is essentially a matter of luck: the winner has simply won an amazing run at throws of the dice.  
MCPX

anwar ceramah in rembau 150208 anwarAnother theory holds the winner as one who early has his eyes firmly fixed on the main chance. He steers by a compass pointed at his goal and though at times the needle might waver, it always returns to true north.

This type has an infinite capacity to take trouble and is good at concentrating on the essentials of his goal while showing benign indifference to the manifold vexations that can canker an aspirant even as it instructs him.

Anwar Ibrahim quite clearly belongs in the second category. In the frenetic rhythms of his campaign to gain admission to Parliament through the by-election in Permatang Pauh, the PKR leader has combined the stamina of a marathon runner with the concentration of an archer intent on the target.

anwar pasar malam walkabout 200808 01At the tail end of his campaign, Anwar was like one of the medal contenders in the grueling long distance events at the Olympics, clearly fatigued and ashen-faced from the strain, but retaining just enough panache to go through the rituals of pressing the flesh that precede a speech at any one stop.

But once the microphone is handed the PKR supremo after a usually strident emcee has made the introduction, all the signs of a hamster working a treadmill fade and in its stead a small masterpiece of the orator's art emerges.

anwar nurul izzah permatang pauh campaign 250808The orator's art may resemble a great stage artiste's: his content and delivery must connect with the private recesses of his audience. After a few minutes into his spiel, Anwar invariably makes the link; his grasp of what moves an audience he encounters telepathic.

And the crowd, whether at a stall in Jalan Semilang in Seberang Jaya on a hot afternoon or milling on the porch of an end lot in a terrace row in Seberang Jaya Dua in the early evening, draws closer and cranes to get a better look at the conjuror weaving his verbal wand.

### **Top of the rhetorical game**

At one stop, the target is the government's 15-sen cut in petrol price – Anwar said it was too small and too late to stop the inflationary spiral ("I would get it down by 70 sen); at another, he ridicules the call to reveal his party's funds for the by-election ("The stallholders in Pantai Dalam in Kuala Lumpur came to my house to donate RM30 because they can't come all the way to Permatang Pauh to help out").

anwar ibrahim penang kg kota permatang pauh by election campaign 140808 12Anwar, the

populist, is on top of the rhetorical game. "My campaign is financed by the rakyat," he says and the crowd empathises.

"It is the people's small gifts that fund my campaign, not the big sums that they [BN] steal from the public to finance their campaign to rob the people of their rights," he thunders to the crowd.

When he sees that the crowd is up on educational levels, he turns teacher, explaining that his campaign is not just about winning power for himself but to bring change to the political culture so that the country can progress rather than stagnate as he says it has under BN's prolonged rule.

"I don't want power for its own sake but for the sake of bringing all the people of Malaysia – whether Malay, Chinese, or Indian and the bumiputera of Sabah and Sarawak – up to where they should be after 51 years of Merdeka," he tells a mixed-race audience.

crowd at ceramah permatang pauh 250808 01In the back rows, some in the crowd nod at the speaker's apparent earnestness. At these stops, it is usually a 15 or 20-minute speech which combines all the verbal flourishes at which Anwar is master.

Then he is off to the next stop, his words resonating after the last sentence is spoken, the enduring effect of the orator's art.

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