

'Forgive, not forget' vs Sodomy 2.0
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Anwar Ibrahim's campaign theme in the run-up to the Aug 26 by-elections in Permatang Pauh - Forgive, Not Forget - has struck a resounding chord with the constituency's multiracial electorate.
MCPX

The eve of voting mood among the electorate makes Anwar, the self-proclaimed prime minister-in-waiting, a virtual shoo-in for Parliament. It's all systems go.

The opposition has pulled out all stops to ensure the logistics of getting their voters to turn up in droves at the polling stations. They are leaving nothing to chance. The aim is an even bigger majority than the last time when Anwar's wife, party president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, came in with a thumping majority.

permatang pauh by election candiadtes anwar and arif shah hanafi hamatThe energetic and charismatic Anwar - who has put in stints as a visiting professor at two American universities - has an unassailable lead over challenger Arif Shah Omar Shah from Umno.

The electorate, meanwhile, was tickled pink by media disclosures that Arif Shah, who holds a diploma, once signed up for a bogus PhD programme at a foreign 'university'. The contrasts could not be greater. He also had to fend off allegations in the media that he was linked with a company run by his scandal-tainted brother.

The main Umno theme was the second sodomy allegations against Anwar by an ex-coffee boy, Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan.

On the eve of nomination, the Uniten dropout came out of weeks of hiding and swore on the Quran at a mosque - an attempt to support the veracity of this claims. He followed this up the next day with a much publicised visit to the Federal Territory Islamic Affairs Religious Department, in the words of a veteran opposition leader, "to discuss his infamous anus".

Economy, not sodomy

Here is a sampling from various campaign watchers including several veteran political observers and analysts in cyberspace, by email, SMS and Skype:

lewd vulgar sodomy stunt display by umno bn puteri umno supporters at permatang pauh nomination day 180808 03"Umno was petty, personal, trivialising the important issues and even more childish than usual."

"People are not concerned about a person's sex life, their sexual preferences, or the lack of it."

"The voters are more savvy now and are interested in the big issues, the state of the nation and local issues, not what Umno had to say."

"Umno should not say things like: 'Anwar is prepared to even destroy the nation in order to

achieve his personal ambition of being prime minister'. So, it's okay for someone like Najib to want to be prime minister but not Anwar. Why? Najib should not see himself as the heir apparent or crown prince."

"The Chinese are saying: Let's give Anwar a chance."

"No Indian will vote for Umno. That's why they arrested the Hindraf activists in the area and even sponsored a bogus group claiming to be a splinter Hindraf faction."

permatang pauh 230808 posters 10The government, in an attempt to turn the tide, lowered the fuel price. Traders refuse to lower their prices in response, leaving consumers with an even more "bitter taste in the mouth" at best and "fuming" at worst. Inflation is 8.5 percent and raging, is at its worst in over two decades and Bank Negara, the central bank, continues to sit on the Overnight Policy Rate of 3.5 percent.

There are sharp criticisms amongst the weary citizenry that the federal government is in panic mode.

"One day, Consumer Minister Shahrir Samad says that the fuel price will only be reviewed in December, Prime Minister (Abdullah) Badawi contradicts that it will be reviewed Sept 1 and the very next day he hurriedly lowers the price without any explanation whatsoever," points out a analyst who detects an uncertain note in the stock market.

"These kinds of flip-flops are not good for the government. This is the second incident of its kind - shifting dates - involving the fuel price. It's a PR disaster"

The consensus is that the Abdullah government wanted to take the wind out of the sails in the opposition's re-current theme, 'Hari ini bentuk kerajaan, esok turun harga minyak' (Today form the government, tomorrow down with the fuel price).

percentage of seats in parliament 300408The opposition - 81 compared to BN's 140 - had pledged to wrest the reins of the federal government in Putrajaya by Sept 16 - the anniversary date of Borneo's entry into the federation.

In the midst of campaigning and leading the charge in Permatang Pauh, Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak, swore in a local mosque that he "did not know the Mongolian woman" - alluding to the Altantuya Shaariibuu whose murder trial is ongoing.

Time to leave behind the past

In the end, what appears to matter is the long-promised prospects of change pledged by the opposition Pakatan Rakyat, a coalition of PKR, DAP and PAS with present support from Hindraf.

PKR pledges 'ketuanan rakyat' (supremacy of the people); PAS wants a government free of racism which is prohibited by Islam; DAP pledges a Malaysian Malaysia; and Hindraf, under its 'makkal sakthi' (people power) platform, wants equal rights as guaranteed under the Federal Constitution.

"'Forgive, Not Forget' sums up the mood of the opposition and the people," says a PKR insider.

anwar ibrahim ceramah in tok kandu permatang pauh by election 220808 06 "We want to move on and leave behind the baggage of the past. Still, there must be a proper accounting of the past. What we need is a complete re-making of Malaysia and the re-building of our national institutions which have been destroyed and compromised during the 50 years of BN rule. We need to come together as a people and as a nation. We can't be side-tracked by petty politics and politicking."

Adds a ranking PAS insider: "The Malays who voted for Wan Azizah will all vote for Anwar as they voted for him before. There's no reason to vote for Umno which has become irrelevant. They don't have an ideology. In the past, they used to harp on development and threatened the voters with it.

"Surely, you don't expect the Indians and Chinese to vote for Umno when they keep talking about 'ketuanan Melayu' (supremacy of the Malays) and waving the keris. BN is looking more and more like an unholy collection of race-based parties thriving on the old colonial tactics of divide-and-rule. This is not surprising since they stepped into the vacuum created by the British when they left."

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