

**Permatang Pauh: Sign of a new dawn**  
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**Athi Veerangan**

Pak Abu is back for his morning chat in a coffee shop before rushing to work out on his plot of padi field. Ah Kow, in the sundry business, drives along to deliver provisions in the neighbourhood while Lingam slowly rides his motorcycle to work.  
MCPX

After an exciting and gruelling 10 days, life is back to normal in Permatang Pauh with people and vehicles able to rush in and out of its urban areas (without the jams now) and quiet returns to the villages.

But when one picks up a casual conversation with a constituent, especially a younger one, one could sense that the majority in Permatang Pauh have a sense of pride and defiance as if they had just won a battle.

"It was as if they have voted for the good to triumph over evil," lamented a senior Umno member, Salleh Yakop, 71.

After all they had just went through the 'mother of all by-election', held the entire nation almost at ransom and kept Malaysians guessing wildly on whom they will pick.

**Very own famous son**

Never mind if others want a particular opposition leader to win, in the end it was in the hands of the people of Permatang Pauh.

anwar permatang pauh polling day 260808 11Everyone could generally agree that the by-election had bestowed upon the Permatang Pauh electorate a national duty to re-define and refine the country's future direction.

When they finally spoke through the ballots, the result was devastating to BN like a dagger pierced through the heart.

More than two-third of Permatang Pauh voters decided that they want to be represented only by their very own famous son - Anwar Ibrahim.

The constituency's favourite son has returned to Parliament as an opposition leader with a vengeance after a 10-year absence.

His political rollercoaster ride from a young social activist to deputy premier; then a convict and finally the parliamentary opposition's shadow prime minister is a tailor-made script for a Hollywood drama.

In Permatang Pauh, Anwar's victory was never in doubt from the start.

After all, the constituency has been his stronghold since 1982, and just five months ago, his wife Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail had retained the seat with a landslide.

At the same time, the Anwar-led opposition coalition had swept aside BN and captured Penang.

Anwar's victory has also made Penangites proud - in fact, they could even brag that for the first time in Malaysian political history, the prime minister and the opposition leader are Penang-born.

arif shah omar shah bn candidate permatang pauh 180808 Ironically, both are members of parliament in neighbouring constituencies.

The close proximity of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's Kepala Batas constituency with Permatang Pauh reveals the uniqueness of Penangites being opposition minded and pro-establishment at the same time.

Reasons that made the difference between choosing Anwar and his nearest rival, BN's Arif Shah Omar Shah were personal charisma, campaign tone and message, and party unity.

It is clear that while PKR, PAS and DAP leaders and supporters combined effectively for the first time under the Pakatan Rakyat banner to send Anwar back to parliament, such unity and cohesiveness were hardly visible in the BN camp.

### **Imported campaigners**

Umno deputy president Najib Abdul Razak and the party's national team ran the campaign without meaningful participation Penang or Permatang Pauh Umno.

Umno youth and wanita leaders and members who would comb every corner to garner votes for BN candidates in the past, were virtually non-existent this time.

So was Permatang Pauh Umno machinery. Umno campaigners were imported from as far as Johor, Kelantan and Sabah.

permatang pauh by election aftermath reflection 280808 08A local Umno youth member, Rizal Man, 31, revealed that many Umno members did not even vote because firstly, they were fed up with internal bickering among Permatang Pauh Umno leaders and secondly, they thought Anwar would win anyway.

Indeed, said a local Umno leader, the BN strategy was wrong and weak from the start when it entered the ring only to reduce Anwar's majority. That is viewed as a sign of surrendering before the fight.

Like many others, Rizal and his friends plan to hop to PKR.

"When I look around, many have jumped from Umno to PKR. I don't want to be isolated," he said.

In Permatang Pauh, Umno has some 19,000 members, MCA 2,700, MIC 1,900 and PPP 1,042, totaling 24,642.

But many did not bother to turn up.

What remains a mystery is how Arif Shah could garner 15,524 votes when many BN voters

stayed away and the Election Commission has officially announced at 7pm that only 65.25 per cent (38,144 voters) of the registered 58,459 voters have cast their ballots.

Anwar secured 31,195 votes; Akim's Hanafi Mamat 92 votes

In the end, 81 per cent or 16 per cent more (some 9,000 voters) votes were cast. Several local community and political leaders were curious when they saw many new faces voting in their constituency.

permatang pauh by election aftermath reflection 280808 06Three buses with passengers, suspected to be phantom voters, were rounded up along the Butterworth - Kulim Expressway with two more buses in Penanti by PKR supporters led by PKR leaders N Gobalakrishnan and Shamsul Iskandar.

Ironically, the suspected phantoms were freed once Malacca chief minister Ali Rustam arrived at the Seberang Jaya police station, while Padang Serai MP Gobalakrishnan, his two sons and an aide was punched, kicked and arrested for stopping the buses.

Gobalakrishnan wife, R Vasanthi was also at the receiving end of police brutality.

The commotion sparked a mini demonstration by PKR supporters but they were quickly dispelled by baton-wielding riot police.

The parliamentarian, his sons, Pravin and Arvind, and the aide were released on bail yesterday pending criminal charges.

### **Anwar's persona**

Five voters found their names missing from EC's updated electoral roll, including one Ang Kean Tatt, 25, who was shocked to know that he had been presumed dead. permatang pauh by election aftermath reflection 280808 12  
Ang has since lodged a police report.

The arrest of nine Hindu Rights Action Force activists added more drama to the colourful, but bitter and ugly by-election campaign.

Despicable personal attacks on Anwar, racist campaign against Pakatan Rakyat and manipulation of religion, including Islam and Hinduism, had clearly stirred the sentiments and consolidate the locals to rise to the occasion to protect their 'tribal king.'

Anwar's persona was certainly a value-added vote puller.

While BN was coming with one strategy after another to corner and humiliate Anwar, the PKR de facto leader was always one step ahead and kept his cool.

He remained defiant but persuasive in his oratory skills and campaign messages.

For the first time, a local Malay politician has used a multi-racial platform to campaign successfully in a Malay heartland,

It's a sign for the future and, undoubtedly, one for a new dawn.

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