

THE STAR

DATE: 1 / 8 / 2008

# Tough steps ahead for Anwar

The Star - 1/8/2008

**A**FTER months of speculation, it was his loyal wife Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail who quit her seat, paving the way for Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's formal ascent.

Permatang Pauh is Anwar's fortress. This is his land and the popular "Pak Sheikh" is almost assured of winning there, no matter how huge the cannons and how deep the coffers Barisan Nasional brings in.

The choice of seat indicates that Anwar is not as confident of public perception of him today, to risk standing in another constituency.

For months, Kulim-Bandar Baharu and Bandar Tun Razak were bandied about as strong possibilities – the first because of a pending election petition and the second because Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim has trouble dividing his time between his parliamentary duties and those as Selangor's chief executive.

For the past month, Anwar has had to fend off allegations of sodomy, based on a police report filed on June 28 by his former aide Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan, 23.

Investigations have been stymied as Anwar has yet to give his DNA sample. His lack of cooperation with the police has encouraged more Malays, in particular, to believe the allegations to perhaps have some merit.

Even before Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's announcement of his plan to contest in the Permatang Pauh by-election, his supporters have already dubbed him 'prime minister in waiting' – but Barisan Nasional won't be letting him continue his formal ascent into national politics without a do-or-die battle.



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**COMMENT**  
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This declaration of a by-election is another step in Anwar's well laid out plans to form a government by Sept 16, the symbolic deadline coinciding with Malaysia Day.

Those in Sabah who had prevaricated over a threatened crossover last month, will now have to swallow humble pie. In Sarawak, politicians had been more astute. They had taken the non-partisan line that they would support the prime minister of the day.

Up till yesterday, Dr Wan Azizah was the Opposition Leader. If Anwar wins, she will pass that baton too to her husband.

At home, this will give him official legitimacy. Internationally, he does not need it.

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Already his supporters have dubbed Anwar "prime minister in waiting" – a phrase Anwar himself has unabashedly claimed for himself – but the Barisan is not giving him the number one Opposition seat without a do-or-die battle.

There is no doubt that Anwar has been the man running the PKR. And to his credit, he had worked tirelessly before the March 8 general

election to bring the DAP and PAS together in some sort of loose electoral pact. This later evolved into the Pakatan Rakyat.

But Pakatan is an uneasy coalition. Some component leaders have resented some of the policies they have had to subscribe to in the interests of "the greater good". By turns, each component has felt itself side-stepped or downgraded – at times even ignored.

The tussle to form the state governments was a prime example of unhappy power-sharing, when it should have been a time of celebration.

Anwar has the advantage of having known some of the PAS leaders from his days leading the Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Abim) Youth movement in the 1970s and early 1980s, when he was brought into Umno. A few are his personal friends who were conspicuously seen at his home when he was released in 2004.

These PAS leaders were adamant, when asked in Parliament lobby in

April and May, that Anwar was their natural choice as leader – "because of his (government) experience and how he had risen again after having been dropped in 1998," said one.

But by last month, PAS leaders were less forthcoming about their regard for Anwar in light of his sodomy case.

The best thing that Anwar has done for the country is to give it an idea of how a two-party system could work. Citizens suddenly realised that Umno was not invincible and the Barisan had its faults.

He should stop there.

By aspiring to be prime minister, Anwar now has to prove that he can better the Barisan. It is a tough call. Unlike the Barisan components – none of whom have strong ideological differences – DAP and PAS are poles apart.

Aside from Anwar, their points of commonality hinge around good governance and democratic ideals. On religion and race, they stand on either side of the moon.

Anwar's move may have been hastened too by Umno's recent admission of high-level talks with PAS "for Islam and Malay unity". If PAS were to entertain thoughts of forging even a loose alliance with Umno, Pakatan will be shaken to its roots.

One man and his ambitions then would not be enough to hold the disparate group together.