

# Beyond Teluk no shielding of

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On politics...

By **ABDULLAH AHMAD**

## **BN should seize the political initiative following Teluk Kemang for a supportive media and smart talk won't win the next general elections**

AFTER four days of listening to speeches at the 7th World Editors' Forum and the 53rd World Association of Newspaper Congress in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, I have decided to reflect on issues back home.

First on my mind is the Teluk Kemang by-election result which was not too pleasing. Chairman of Barisan Nasional (BN) Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, contrary to his public image, is quite an open-handed leader and a good listener. In fact, as one senior minister intimated to me, he can be "too good" a listener at times.

Well before the last general elections and more so now, he has been shedding the alleged protectionist shield and is opening himself to several views within Umno as well as beyond the BN traditional territory.

With a growing young IT-savvy population, he realises that whether we like it or not, a mental revolution has begun in our nation and is poised to bring in huge changes. There must be impetus for such changes and to apprise them all the time.

The alliance of Umno, MCA and MIC brought us independence and a grand alliance (consisting of the Malayan Alliance and pro-Malaysia parties in Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak )

formed Malaysia in 1963. Umno and BN, I know, are convinced that they have not only to be a part of the revolution but they also have to lead it through political adaptation or become, as their opponents passionately wish, irrelevant. Shape up or lose out.

Umno, BN component parties and the Malaysian media should and must take a leading role in the various transitions. From too much self-censorship, they should move towards greater openness.

For their own good, they must not be conditioned by the possible reactions of Dr Mahathir. Tun Daim, Datuk Seri 'Abdullah Badawi or this or that person. Neither should they be afraid of possible repercussions just because they speak out openly and frankly.

Dr Mahathir, to be fair, has not stifled the dissenting views within Umno and RN. Neither has his Government repressed the opposition even though Pas has been hard at work splitting the Muslim Bumiputeras.

The small third force in British politics, the Liberal Party, has an extraordinary record for winning parliamentary by-election seats. Keadilan supporters, if they are honest with themselves, must admit that their party's performance, though good, is still not good enough.

Teluk Kemang was a freak for Keadilan. I believe the election outcome largely reflects the discontentment of an electorate sickened by local BN organisations and local government.

They snatched the opportunity to deliver a direct message to the Government in Kuala Lumpur.

As I expected, and wrote last week, there would be no upset in Teluk Kemang, a safe BN seat held for the last 36 years by the MIC. Mr S. Sothinathan did well enough although BN's majority was reduced. The new MP is an authentic, born and bred in Port Dickson, and I expect him, as his constituents would, to discharge his responsibilities fairly to all his voters.

Keadilan, through the DAP and Pas, successfully exploited the pig issue and Islam to win over the Chinese and

# Kemang — weaknesses

## **BN leaders need to live by what their slogan proclaims — cekap, bersih, amanah**

Malay votes.

Even after 43 years of Merdeka, we should acknowledge that race, colour and religion are still serious issues of prejudice and dissent. On June 10, there was not a great deal of demonstrable public and private energy expended in Teluk Kemang to choose a new member of parliament. Why bother? Because the “people already knew who the next MP for the constituency would be. It had to be Sothinathan.

The voters walked past the deluded Keadilan booths, entered the polling stations, solemnly in-

scribed their crosses against the names of either Sothinathan or Ruslan Kassim. They did not have to stay late because at 9.30pm, there was announced, yet again, a BN victory.

The BN, and Umno in particular, should seize the political initiative following Teluk Kemang — the first parliamentary by-election — for this was no Sanggang. Merely relying on a supportive media and smart talk to win the next general elections, I would say, will not work. Believing this would be like living in a fool’s paradise.

Nor is it enough to leave everything to Dr Mahathir to take the lead to promote the BN.

I must stress this: Image or perception is vital. Money buys only good work. BN leaders need to overcome the fear of change; live by what their slogan proclaims — cekap,

bersih, amanah.

The one thing that will bring no good to BN, and Umno in particular, is to appear disdainful of this proclamation. They must live as ordinary people do, as much as they can.

The Bumiputeras are divided. One group wants to maintain the status quo though enhancing good governance by Umno. This appeals to moderate Bumiputeras and other Malaysians who are afraid of a leap in the dark.

A Pas-led Barisan Alternatif (BA) will devalue their social freedom and intrude into their private and public lives.

Pas wants to establish an Islamic nation allegedly based on the Quran and sayings of the Prophet. But what they really want is political Islam. Under a Pas-led government, there would be segregation between men and women, no drinking, no singing, dancing and no karaoke. No fun, no nothing whatsoever except ascetic living.

The way to preserve the status quo is to say No to BA. And to vote No in 2003. But let me remind you that the no-nonsense Islamists in Pas have become, and will become, formidable, in part, thanks to the DAP. It has given Pas a raincheck, a political endorsement (though underplayed for obvious reasons) for the party, in principle, to prepare for the creation of an Islamic nation.

Many Malaysians who bravely said they would oppose an Islamic state are now, following Pas’ stunning electoral performance in its 49 years of history, sympathetic to its cause.

Does this mean they are now ready to accept an Islamic state or consider this desirable at some point?