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All roads lead to Teluk Kemang on Sat

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OXBRIDGE mythology provides fertile ground for feverish imaginations for prospective students who are worried about their interview technique.

Modern Oxford and Cambridge are looking for young scholars, not about their backgrounds or how they hold a knife and fork - it was once a long time ago.

If you want to find out about the state of a rural parliamentary constituency, you could, I suppose, begin with a visit to Teluk Kemang, a slightly Malay-majority seat which has been, by tradition, represented by the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) since the first general election in 1959, an excellent example of inter-racial political alliance.

T. Mahima Singh won the seat - then known as Port Dickson - uncontested in 1959. Singh and Datuk K. Pathmanaban represented the constituency for a total 26 years between them, until Singh was unseated by A. Soorian of DAP with a majority of 3,660 in the tumultuous 1969 general election.

Pas' candidate Mansor Abu Bakar polled 1,872. The electorate then was 26,623. Pathmanaban, who regained the seat in 1974, served Teluk Kemang for 11 years until he was replaced by Dr T. Marimuthu, a Universiti Malaya don, when Pathmanaban and MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu clashed and Pathmanaban lost.

Pathmanaban, his friends insisted and still insist, should have put up a fight and not give up through default.

The constituency has 66,649 voters made up of 45.44 per cent of Malays; Chinese - 33.23 per cent and 20.64 per cent Indians, in what used to be, and I still believe, is the biggest concentration of Indian voters in any parliamentary constituency in the nation.

In any event, Teluk Kemang voters reflect a well-balanced racial make-up of the country.

Yesterday, I visited Port Dickson, a resort of sorts, my first in three decades. Of course, there are many changes.

Judging by appearances alone, the hotel I had afternoon tea at and another hotel where I sat to write this article while having drinks with a companion, are a hundred thousand miles away from the luxury and hospitality of Honolulu.

But look a little deeper, you will find the two resorts are committed to giving tourists the best welcome and service possible.

All roads lead to Teluk Kemang this Saturday - only a short distance from Kuala Lumpur - a good one hour and fifteen minutes by car (depending on how fast you drive).

Port Dickson is a part of Teluk Kemang parliamentary constituency. Hundreds of cars, filled with supporters of both parties, are traveling daily after office hours to campaign for their men, either Barisan Nasional's candidate, S. Sothinathan, 40, a former political secretary to Samy Vellu or Keadilan's Ruslan Kasim, 41.

Since nomination day last week, Teluk Kemang and Port Dickson, generally not favoured places, have become popular destinations of people from Kuala Lumpur.

The opposition, as always, is confident of creating an upset, but I do not believe it is possible. I have checked the history and current situation before penning this article.

The facts are that Teluk Kemang, like many other rural constituencies, has made great strides in the socio-economic development benefiting all

races of all backgrounds.

Keadilan will exploit its ignorance and hatred of the government and especially of the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

What Keadilan's campaigners say now was not true two years before and they are certainly not true today.

The opposition will relaunch their hatred against Dr Mahathir and the "black eye imagery" in order, in part, to deflect attention from the party's internal problems and squabbles.

The Teluk Kemang by-election will be less discomfoting for BN as Sanggang was. Mistakes will not be repeated and adjustments made to yield more votes. The balanced ethnic mix requires careful handling, and the government party has always been good at it, a skill that Keadilan, Pas and DAP - so far evidently lack.

That notwithstanding, it is foolish for BN and MIC in particular, to be complacent just because Teluk Kemang has always been a safe seat.

Teluk Kemang - the first parliamentary by-election since the general election - offers an excellent chance for BN and MIC to have the humility of spirit to listen to the people.

Avoid repeating the mistake the BN made in Kelantan: it had and has little signs of humility and it will soon become irrelevant in Kelantan far more than it ever was.

The BN, through the MIC, has put up one of the brightest candidates with excellent potential for high office in the future.

Sothinathan is a first-class honours degree holder in Business Administration from Universiti Malaya. He also has a law degree like his opponent does.

Sothinathan is in a better position to help Teluk Kemang voters to advance their economic status than Ruslan.

A certain Cabinet minister, between munching satay at the Istana Negara reception yesterday, told me: "We will win (Insya Allah - God willing) but Umno had better overcome a few things which are holding back the vote-getting machinery from functioning effortlessly."

Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and Samy Vellu at the same function told me that everything is in place and there is nothing to worry. Still, a lesser than good performance by the late Anpalagan will not look "pretty" for the BN and MIC. Indeed, it will cause some anxiety all round.

I know that sensitive issues are being brought up by the opposition. It badly wants to win this poll to boost Keadilan's continuing battered image.

The question of race and religion which were non-issues following the traumatic May 13 incident have reared its ugly heads - thanks to the so-called non-communal Keadilan and other allegedly non-racial parties in the Barisan Alternatif.

The opposition must be really desperate if pigs have become an issue. The MCA, I am quite sure, will be able to tackle the problem of the pigs effectively.

The MCA, I understand, has said the feedback from the Chinese voters has been positive which will make a big difference to how big the BN majority will be. The bigger the turnout from the non-Malay voters, the better.

The heat is on the Malay voters. Most of them will vote for BN. Still, it is wise to get a good turn out of voters than during the November election which was 68.92 per cent.

I am surprised that there were 1,867 spoilt votes last November. Either they did it deliberately or there were that many people who still can't read and write.

The Indian voters should come out in full force. After all, what the estate workers have been clamouring for, which they deserve, are being

worked out by the government.

The voters of Teluk Kemang may be rural but there can be few rural people anywhere in the world so politically aware.

To a large measure this political awareness is due to Negri Sembilan's durable Menteri Besar, Tan Sri Isa Samad, whose state constituency of Linggi is one of the five state constituencies which constitute Teluk Kemang.

Pathmanaban and Marimuthu also contributed in raising the level of political consciousness and high expectation.

Isa delivered a perfect score sheet in last November's general election, the poll which did not change Malaysia's history as wished by the wistful-thinking politicians and their "foreign handlers".

It was this success in the election which made him and Datuk Ghani Othman (who also delivered a perfect electoral score sheet in Johor) to contest for vice-presidential posts in Umno Supreme Council election on May 11.

Both were soundly beaten. It must have been a sobering experience for them.

There will be an air of great expectancy this Saturday both in Teluk Kemang and Kuala Lumpur.

Teluk Kemang has been a safe for the Government for 41 years, and nothing is going to change. The question is not who will win but by how much - either bigger than what BN polled against DAP in November (9,942 majority) or otherwise.

I believe, all being well, the majority should be bigger than last November.

In the absence of a schism in the MIC and following its well-publicised and successful 54th annual conference, I hope, lessons can also be learnt from MIC's success during the last general election.

The demonstrable improvement in the standard of living of Malaysian Indians in the recent years must be welcomed.

When Sothinathan takes his seat in Parliament - I have no doubt he will - he will, I hope, serve his constituency in which he was born and raised - in difficult circumstances - well by helping to raise the standard of living of the disadvantaged constituents of all races.

The BN election machinery, especially which involves getting out the Malay voters in droves must be improved.

Petty misunderstandings between adun or state assemblymen and even the "disenchantment" with Isa must be put aside in order to ensure the machinery work effortlessly, especially that which is monitoring the activities of the anti-government students who are doing door-to-door canvassing on behalf of the opposition.

Pretending that Teluk Kemang voters are satisfied and do not aspire for more does neither MIC and other BN component parties, especially Umno, the Government any favour.

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