

PKR's multiracialism vs BN's seat-sharing
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Addressing the widely-held disappointment at PKR fielding of a Malay candidate for the Ijok state by-election, its vice-president R Sivarasa said there is a difference between PKR's 'genuine' multiracialism and Barisan Nasional's 'racial-compartmentalisation'.

Those aggrieved at the opposition party's choice of Khalid Ibrahim because they feel the party's Indian leader KS Nallakaruppan should contest in what many see as a 'traditional MIC seat' perhaps had fallen into just such 'false' compartmentalisation, he contended.

"Barisan has locked us into false compartments. In politics, that has translated into 'this is a Chinese-MCA seat, that is an Indian-MIC seat'. They're trying to lock us into that compartmentalisation," said Sivarasa told Malaysiakini in an interview at his home yesterday.

"We are trying to break away from that," he added.

Both within and outside of Parti Keadilan Rakyat, quarters have alleged that parochial aims to win the Ijok by-election by appealing to the majority Malay constituents would be at the expense of resentment by the Indian community and claims that they were being 'sidelined' by the party.

While slightly over half of Ijok's electorate are Malays, the seat has a sizeable Indian electorate at 28 percent, the second largest in Selangor.

While threats to boycott the Ijok campaign had initially been proposed, a former PKR member has gone further to slam party advisor Anwar Ibrahim for not practicing what he preaches and to claim BN is fairer in its treatment of the minority communities than PKR.

Consistent struggle

Sivarasa said genuine multiracialism consists in a party advocating and struggling consistently for equal treatment and opportunities for all regardless of race, something which PKR has done since its inception in the reformasi era.

"BN's success as a coalition is that it has parceled out its seat, it's got its racial formula, and that's what's holding it together," he said.

"But for me, and for most people and most Indians, in reality, there is no genuine multiracialism (as a result of the BN formula). There's a sharing of seats, but that's it. It doesn't translate into genuine multiracialism in terms of equality of rights, access to a fair share of the nation's wealth, and all the (other) issues that minorities bring up," he added.

PKR's commitment to multiracialism should be measured primarily by its political positioning and its stand on such issues as need-based affirmative action and equal justice regardless of race, said Sivarasa.

"For me, that is (genuine) multiracial politics," he added.

Sivarasa also said the significance of the Ijok by-election for PKR, which does not have any significant presence in the Selangor state assembly, lies solely in its political impact on the general election.

The most important criterion for deciding the candidate in this by-election is, therefore, that candidate's "winnability", he said.

To suggestions that PKR's long-term credibility and support among the Indian community would suffer as a result of the selection of Khalid, Sivarasa said the word on the ground suggested otherwise.

"There's quite a lot of feedback from Indians on the ground (in Ijok) that they're quite happy with the candidate being Khalid," he said.

More interestingly, Sivarasa said further, MIC leaders themselves are said to have preferred an Indian candidate from PKR.

"So you can see, that's our opponent (saying this) and, of course, our opponent would want the less-winnable candidate. There was very clear feedback and they said, 'we'd be very happy if it was an Indian candidate' because in terms of winnability, they'd have an edge," he said.

"Now, I think (with Khalid in the running), they're under pressure," added Sivarasa.

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