

**Gerakan president: Ijok a tough fight**  
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**RK Anand**

Penang Chief Minister and newly-minted Gerakan president Dr Koh Tsu Koon believes that the upcoming Ijok by-election in Selangor will be challenging.

"It is a tough fight, we (Barisan Nasional) are up against a big shot (Parti Keadilan Rakyat candidate Khalid Ibrahim)

"Our candidate (K Parthiban) is a common man, but he is young and energetic," he told Malaysiakini when met in Ijok last night.

In view of this, he said the ruling coalition would work hard to explain to the locals about its policies and objectives.

Quizzed on the corruption claims churned out by opposition leaders during their talks, Koh dismissed them as nothing more than mere allegations. "They have been singing the same tune for years," he said.

As to whether the presence of former deputy premier and PKR advisor Anwar Ibrahim would have an impact, he said it could happen to a certain extent.

However, Koh claimed that most people turned up at Anwar's talks merely because of his oratory skills.

He then recollected the words of recently retired Gerakan president Dr Lim Keng Yaik.

"Lim said he started reforms when he was in MCA and got fired (for this), Anwar started talking about reforms only after he got fired (from the government)."

While Anwar is definitely a crowd puller, political observers have questioned his influence and whether his charisma would help bag votes for the opposition.

They have asked if the ex-deputy premier remained relevant to the present Malaysian political landscape.

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One person who disagreed with the view that Anwar's influence could be declining was PKR vice-president Azmin Ali.

Met at the sidelines of an Anwar talk in Ijok last night, he said the PKR advisor was still capable of drawing in the votes.

He also said the opposition party had received a warm response from the local electorate in Ijok, especially among Chinese voters.

However, he said PKR met difficulties in penetrating hardcore MIC areas such as Kampung Sungai Darah and Tuan Mee.

Despite the hardships, he said there had been "some progress" and party leaders met voters there on one or two occasions.

He claimed that PKR workers faced harassment and intimidation in these areas from the authorities as well as local BN leaders.

"Even the police special branch have warned voters in these places not to attend Anwar's talks," he alleged.

"These are poor Indian people and we understand their situation," he added.

Azmin - who heads the PKR election bureau - also took a swipe at the Election Commission (EC) which he described as "irresponsible and irrelevant."

To illustrate his point, he cited the recently concluded Machap by-election in Malacca. "There were blatant violations (of election rules by BN) but the EC did not act," he claimed.

As for PKR's chances in Ijok, he said: "I don't want to appear over-confident but I feel encouraged by the response from the voters.

"We have a candidate who can represent all races. Khalid is also a local boy and a big player in the corporate world. Ijok voters must think wisely.

"I'm quite comfortable (with the situation). We have five days to go (before polling) but we are up against the whole government and they are pouring in millions," he added.

The central theme of the opposition party's campaign is that 'a vote for Khalid is a vote for change and justice'.

The effectiveness of this campaign would be revealed when Ijok's 12,272 voters cast their ballots on Saturday.

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