

Walkabout with Ijok candidates
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With just four days to the Ijok by-election, rookie candidates K Parthiban and Khalid Ibrahim are on walkabouts around Batang Berjuntai to bring a personal touch to campaigning.

Barisan Nasional's Parthiban, 38, the Tanjung Karang MIC division secretary, moved about the housing estates near Batang Berjuntai town in the middle of an afternoon downpour yesterday.

He was warmly welcomed by the locals, each promising to vote for him. Almost all the people seemed to know him.

In the evening, Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) treasurer and Selangor chief Khalid, 61, was seen going around Batang Berjuntai town, telling voters to show courage and vote for change.

Malaysiakini caught up with them separately and posed the same five questions to them.

What are the chances of you winning this by-election?

Parthiban: I am very confident of winning. I think, based on the support from voters of all races, I might even obtain a higher majority (than BN candidate K Sivalingam in 2004).

[The by-election in the Malay-majority state seat has been called following Sivalingam's death on April 4.]

Khalid: Even now as I'm on this campaign trail, I'm fostering a better relationship with the Indian and Chinese communities. You see the (mixed) group of people that I'm going around with right now? You've got to know how to relate to them.

The Malays feel they have not been given a chance to be heard. They have had to compete in order to get representation. It's not that they just want somebody who is a Malay, or that the state assemblyperson has to be a Malay. It has to be a person to whom they can relate. They want somebody who is close to them.

Why should they vote for you?

Parthiban: I am a local boy who knows this place well. I am close to all the local leaders, be they from Umno, MCA or MIC. Until recently I was a Kuala Selangor district councillor and I can get things done for the people here, be it a (clearing a) clogged drain or a (fixing a damaged) street light. I get on well with everyone here and that will help me do my job better.

Khalid: I doubt that he (Parthiban) has as close a relationship with the people as he claims. When I talk to people in the Malay and Chinese communities, they said they would love to have a leader who they can relate to.

Parthiban is a decent person... being close to the people is one thing, but the idea of (community) development needs to be (better) appreciated. It's a question of who is the better and more experienced person (to do that). I'm not saying that Parthiban's age is in the way of developing Ijok... It's up to the people to decide but the person (should be one) with experience.

What sort of economic development could you bring to Ijok?

Parthiban: Look, even now we have brought so much development to Ijok. We have a master plan for the development of Ijok and I will follow through this plan so that this place continues to be developed. These new projects are not just here because of the by-election.

They have been earmarked for Ijok and the by-election has merely brought forward these projects. I also disagree with PKR's economic blueprint for Ijok. What good would it do now after we have already got our master plan which we intend to follow?

Khalid: My idea is basically this: most development comes from the top. The government sends down its ideas to the various places at the lower levels to be implemented. But I think the most effective way for development is to move from bottom-up. We must know the needs of the people and their aspirations, or else you're just a post-box.

BN says, 'Don't bother about who represents you... we can act on your behalf'. It means getting the views of the people is just a post-box exercise. I don't think the people of Ijok want a mere post-box exercise. They're not happy about it. They want more than that. I'm trying to promote the concept of participatory development.

Will you be able to regain the lost votes in the 2004 general election?

Parthiban: Of course, I can. The 2004 general election was different. The late Sivalingam had some issues here and some votes could have gone to the opposition due to that. Now, after meeting with all the voters, I am sure they realise that I am different from Sivalingam and would be able to do a good job if chosen. I am confident that we will regain all these lost votes.

Khalid: Last time, it was a general election. We did not have enough time and resources were spread throughout the country campaigning among all the people. (The party) had to be selective. Now, we're devoting all our resources to campaigning here. I think the effort we're putting in is going to bring in more of the votes that went to BN the last time - its majority wasn't that big anyway.

The assumption that Parthiban is not facing the same circumstances as 2004 and thus has many positive things going for him, well, that's his assumption. We'll have to wait and see about that. I think belying their outward confidence is the fact they're building and repairing roads even at midnight and spending allocations without going through the proper procedures. I think the people of Ijok are much more mature than that.



What happened to the debate?

[Last Sunday, Khalid had challenged Parthiban to a debate over development plans for

Ijok.]

Parthiban: I am very busy now with campaigning. Rain or shine, I am out meeting with voters, introducing myself. I have no time to debate with Khalid. I have various local issues to settle. Let's get past this by-election and then we can have a debate - no matter who wins or loses.

Khalid: I'm giving the opportunity to the people, not BN, to hear both sides. If he's too busy, he's too busy. That's how BN looks at things. They don't want to give opportunities for both sides to present their point of view.

Ijok by-election The candidates	
K Parthiban	Khalid Ibrahim
Age 38, born in Kuala Selangor.	Age 61, born in Kuala Selangor.
	
Education Attended Batang Berjuntai secondary school and later Seri Kota Teachers' Training College. Graduated with a degree in Science and a master's degree in Education, both from Universiti Malaya.	Education Attended Kuala Selangor's Jeram Malay School and later an English school in Kampung Kuantan. Graduated in economics from Universiti Malaya and Masters in Business Administration (MBA) from Australia's Queensland University. He was a lecturer before joining the corporate world.
He has served as a teacher in Tanjung Karang and Kuala Selangor and was the co-academic officer with the Kuala Selangor District Education Department.	1979 - 1994 Chief executive officer (CEO) of Permodalan Nasional Berhad (PNB).
Currently serving as the MIC's Tanjung Karang division secretary	1995 - 2003 CEO of Kumpulan Guthrie Berhad.
2007 Selected as BN candidate for by-election in the state seat of Ijok, Kuala Selangor	2006 Joined Parti Keadilan Rakyat and appointed party treasurer-general. He is also PKR's Selangor state chief and Kuala Selangor division chief.

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