

Last chance for BN from Indian voters
Malaysiakini.com
Apr 26, 2007
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Residents of villages in and around the Coalfield estate in the Tuan Mee electoral district warned BN today that they just about had it with four decades of empty promises - Walk the talk this time, or you'll get booted out, they said.

This was the message of residents when asked about the prospects for BN candidate K Parthiban, who will face Khalid Ibrahim from PKR on Saturday in the Ijok by-election.

Coalfield estate resident Pathmani Loganathan (left), 53, said she and her family had long supported BN coalition partner MIC, even though their repeated pleas to be granted ownership of the land they've lived and worked for 40 years have gone unheeded by politicians.

Her father-in-law and her husband have also long pleaded with and written to local and state BN leaders and government officials for improvements to basic facilities and infrastructure such as proper housing and sewerage.

Until the election campaign kicked off, dirty water from the toilets in residents' houses used to flow openly on the street in front of her home, said Pathmani, a housewife.

Twice - in May 1986 and February 1989 - they had been issued notices to vacate their house and the land, she added.

"At every general election, they have promised to do this and to do that, and we always believed them. The previous Ijok assemblyperson (K) Sivalingam told us whatever land we seek, whatever housing we want, we will get if he wins," she said.

Despite the vast road improvements and other development projects pouring into the area - Pathmani's husband received his land grant from the Kuala Selangor district land office last Friday - residents know these are merely election goodies.

"As soon as Sivalingam won, we didn't see the white of his eyes. Come this time, Parthiban better fulfill the promises of development.

"We believe in Parthiban, we've seen his face, and we feel he can do good things for us. But if nothing happens after this (by-election), in the upcoming general election you will see what will happen to BN in Coalfield," she added.

Tuan Mee's 1,030 voters count for about nine percent of the Ijok total - 76 percent of them Indian, 21 percent Malay, and the remaining three percent Chinese and others. MIC is said to hold an exclusive presence in the area.

Four MIC branches

Other residents claimed, however, that the four MIC party branches have done nothing for them.

It was only when MIC president S Samy Vellu visited the area during the campaign period that the residents' plights were addressed, they said.

"If all these projects can be done at the order of Samy Vellu, what's the use of the four branches," said another BN supporter who declined to be identified.

That was exactly the reason Kampung Sri Aman resident Peter Anthony Samy, 29, said he joined PKR in 1999. He however left the party six years later after 'realising' PKR had no power to bring about development to Tuan Mee.

The fierce loyalty that the community at Coalfield has to MIC is suggested by a recent ordeal Anthony Samy said he suffered on account of his past association with PKR.

Even though he re-entered the MIC fold more than two years ago, villagers still remain suspicious of where his allegiance lies.

Villagers 'reported' him to the police last week, resulting in him having to explain to a police officer from the Gombak district police station last Saturday that he was no more with PKR.

"I don't know who it was from the village that reported me, but they alleged that I was going to sabotage BN's efforts in the area. Until today, I cannot step into that side of the village because I'm afraid of what will happen to me because of what they think I am trying to do," he said.

PKR making inroads

This reflected the difficulty faced by PKR to canvass for votes in this voting district.

Yesterday, a fracas broke out in Kampung Sri Aman between BN supporters and campaigners for PKR seeking to enter the area.

One PKR member was hurt in the incident, following which a police presence has been maintained in the village.

The Coalfield community is not the MIC 'stronghold' that its supporters claim to be, said a resident - a PKR member since 2005 - who requested anonymity out of fear of reprisal by other villagers.

In fact, he claimed further, the failures of MIC have led to such growth of support for the opposition that the area is now divided equally between the incumbent party and PKR.

"The projects are not coming from MIC. We know the money is coming in from the government. I won't vote for either BN or MIC, but whether it is a MIC stronghold or not, we'll find out on Saturday. There are quite a lot of PKR supporters here," he said.

Also putting doubt into claim that the area is a MIC stronghold is PKR leader KS Nallakaruppan when met during a door-to-door campaign exercise in the village today.

"Wherever I went, they know me. They are also willing to help us (in our campaigning)," he said.

Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/66519>