

## **PAS Titiwangsa candidate bred for outreach**

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**By Terence Netto**

COMMENT The influence of place on personality is a matter for conjecture. Some cannot escape their place of origin; others are able to transcend it.

Ahmad Zamri Aas'ad Khuzaimi, the PAS candidate for the parliamentary seat of Titiwangsa, in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, has opted for neither escapism nor transcendence.

NONE Instead he has parlayed the experience of his place of origin into easy facility at dealing with the multiracialism of Malaysian society.

Born in Kampung Chubadak in Sentul, Kuala Lumpur, and raised in the locality's multi-racial working class milieu meant Ahmad Zamri instinctively knew the meaning of '1Malaysia' even before the slogan, with its currently confusing connotations, was coined.

To be born, raised and schooled in Sentul where Malaysia's three major races live cheek by jowl, is to know in your marrow that it is a sign of mediocrity in peoples if they always herd together in their ethnic enclaves, whether at work, play or in the neighbourhood.

In Malaysia, an inclusive vision is often the product of a gregarious individual's interactive experiences across the country's racial and religious divides.

NONE Ahmad Zamri (right) had plenty of such experiences while in the primary and secondary streams of the Methodist Boys School on Jalan Sentul in the 1980s, experiences that went into forging the inclusive vision that is a hallmark of his Islamic party's corps of young professionals, of which as a lawyer-member, this scion of Sentul's multiracial ambience and social democratic ethos does his best to exude.

"I remember my school days well," said Ahmad Zamri, 37, a smile lighting up his face, and when informed that this reporter came from the school just across the road from his, he added with a chuckle, "...and I know what we used to call you guys from La Salle," recalling the derisive epithets playfully bandied across the sporting and academic divides that separated the rival schools.

Racially diverse experiences

But more than early awareness of the benefits of racially diverse interactive experiences was the fact of Sentul's tendency to send candidates with empathy for the underdog to Parliament, from the socialist Ahmad Boestamam in the late 1950s, through to the social democrat Dr Tan Chee Koon in the 1970s.

These days Sentul comes under the parliamentary constituency of Batu, a PKR-leaning constituency where the party's vice-president Tian Chua holds the fort.

So though at one-time former PAS deputy president, the late Hassan Shukri, contested the Batu seat, in the 1986 election (GE7), the fact that PKR has now taken successful hold of the constituency means that Ahmad Zamri, rising through the Youth wing of the party from the time he first enlisted in its ranks in 2003, would have to have his representational ambitions accommodated at some place else than his place of origin.

The death, in 2011, of the PAS MP for Titiwangsa Dr Lo' Lo Ghazali opened the way for Ahmad Zamri to be nominated for the seat that the Islamic party won in the political tsunami of March 2008.

Appropriately enough, in Titiwangsa, Ahmad Zamri was reacquainted with an issue that reinforced what he had learned in his formative years in Sentul: people's ties to their place of origin - in this instance the Malays of Kampung Baru, the oldest ancestral village in the heart of Kuala Lumpur - can be mystical and that tempting inducements cannot be counted on to assuage the sense of deracination felt if one were to were to uproot and leave.

Ancestral land a sensitive issue

He said: "This issue of development of ancestral land here is a sensitive one and has not been handled well by the government," meaning, of course, the BN ruling coalition, whose candidates suffered a near wipeout in KL's parliamentary wards in the 2008 election, with the Umno bastion Titiwangsa, under which Kampung Baru falls, taken for the first time by PAS.

Though Ahmad Zamri has no actual ties with Kampung Baru, his father had worked in the Institute of Medical Research, which lies on the periphery of the famous village, and so he had an early inkling of the area's importance to the KL Malay's sense of identity and presence in a city whose people these days are composed of residents not indigenous to it.

"If we win in Titiwangsa and if the opposition takes Putrajaya, we can tackle the

Kampung Baru problem to the satisfaction of its property owners while, hopefully, striking a nice balance between the need for modernisation of that part of Kuala Lumpur and the preservation of residents and owners' sentimental ties to the place," he said.

"We will consult widely in this process but first, of course, we must win the seat and gain Putrajaya."

For Sentul-sired Ahmad Zamri, that is an inclination to the manner born.

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