

**Opposition 'hopeful' going into final lap**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
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**Beh Lih Yi**

"Judging from the crowd response tonight, I believe we can win this election!" opposition icon Anwar Ibrahim said as he took over the mike at a ceramah held outside a Chinese restaurant in Pekan Ijok last night.

"This is a by-election which PKR is contesting but DAP is fully behind us," he added, referring to the presence of DAP leaders Lim Kit Siang and Dr Tan Seng Giaw.

Since campaigning for the Ijok by-election kicked off last Thursday, PKR has been solidly backed by its two main allies - DAP and PAS. Their leaders descended on Ijok in full force to campaign for PKR's Khalid Ibrahim.

The by-election, with Anwar leading the opposition campaign for the first time since his prison release, is also seen as a test of his leadership among the opposition parties.

Anwar himself had said that it was a 'good start' for his efforts to encourage the opposition parties to close ranks in facing the next general election as leaders of both parties lined up every night to take part in PKR ceramah..

Some DAP and PAS leaders have also 'quietly' shared the same stage to rally support for Khalid although the two parties are known to be at loggerheads over the latter's intention to set up an Islamic state.

### **Top guns**

Among the big guns who regularly turned up include PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang, his deputy Nasharuddin Mat Isa, Youth chief Salahuddin Ayub while DAP was represented by party stalwart Lim Kit Siang and secretary-general Lim Guan Eng.

While DAP leaders have mostly campaigned in Chinese-majority areas - in particular Pekan Ijok and Batang Berjuntai - PAS leaders are tasked to 'take care' of the Malay-majority areas such as Bukit Badong and Jaya Setia.

It appears that efforts have been made to set aside their differences, at least for Ijok. Initially, PAS had wanted to boycott the by-election while DAP had appeared to be rather unhappy over PKR for their 'lukewarm' support in Machap which DAP contested.

For PKR, leaders like Ezam Mohd Noor and Saifuddin Nasution Ismail who have previously expressed discontent over the party have also actively taken part in the election campaign.

## MTUC Workers and Trade Unions Demand Charter

- Better protection for workers and those made redundant
- A fixed eight percent Employees Provident Fund dividend
- A minimum of RM900 for all sectors; housing, education and health rights
- The abolition of oppressive laws such as the Internal Security Act, Sedition Act, Police Act, Universities and University Colleges Act and the Presses and Publications Act.

Azlan Zamhari / Malaysiakini

Khalid also received a big boost when the 500,000-strong Malaysian Trade Union Congress pledged its support for his candidacy yesterday after the former Guthrie group chief inked a charter that vows to protect workers' rights.

Prior to the election, there was a SMS circulation that accused him of ill-treating squatters, the majority of who were Indians, by ordering the demolition of their houses and Hindu temples during his tenure in Guthrie.

### Overseas trip cancelled

In contrast to the carnival-style campaigning ranging from meet-the-people sessions to entertainment of the rival BN, PKR's programmes have mainly featured political talks and walkabouts of the PKR candidate and leaders in the small town of Ijok.

Featuring speakers like Anwar and Kit Siang who are known for their fiery oratorical skills, the ceramah have pulled in consistently large crowds.

After few nights of ceramah, some of the locals were already seen getting used to the chanting of the 'reformasi' slogans and could even shout out phrases like 'rules of the jungle' that were repeatedly stressed by Anwar in his speeches.

But it's still not clear whether such ceramah have any impact on the voters.

"Of course, Anwar's presence here will give some advantage to the opposition but that would not be my main consideration (in terms of voting)," said a local resident when met last night.

Meanwhile, Anwar - who was initially scheduled to leave for Europe on Wednesday to address the Royal Commonwealth Society - had decided to cancel the trip.

"He decided to stay back and fight," an aide to Anwar said.

### Najib breaks long silence

A party insider also noted that promises and election goodies from the BN which have always been effective in the past have not seen an obvious effect in Ijok.

"They have also been put in a situation to respond to issues raised by the opposition. Najib, for example, has to break his long silence to touch on the (Mongolian national Altantuya Shaariibuu) murder case and commissions (allegedly) paid over the defence deals," he said.

While PKR is confident of winning the hearts of the Malay and Chinese voters, a question mark hangs on the support from the Indian voters. The party's campaigners have been harassed and threatened in Indian-majority areas like Sungai Darah and Tuan Mee.

Asked on the party's chances, Anwar told malaysiakini yesterday: "I am encouraged by the response from the local populace. I am not saying that the attendance at our rallies is a barometer but we know the locals do attend and express themselves.

"But my worry is the continued intimidation by the police with 500 Special Branch officers down here, their glaring and blatant presence in many of our ceramah and worse, the possibility of increased voters from the 'phantom members league'".

Polling is expected to begin at 8am and close at 5pm. The official results will be known by 8pm but malaysiakini plans to track the vote counting from about 5.30pm.

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