

Close call but BN will prevail
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K Kabilan

With all the last-minute ceramah, promises, sweeteners, accusations and counter-accusations wrapped up as the campaign comes to a halt at midnight, many political pundits believe BN will retain Ijok with a narrow win over PKR.

"There is no doubt that this will be a close fight. However I think BN will just have the edge to win here," a top MIC leader told malaysiakini tonight.

A PKR canvasser who has been campaigning in this area agreed to this prognosis as well.

The dispute was however on the majority of BN candidate K Parthiban's victory. The Ijok contest is between Parthiban, 38, and PKR's Khalid Ibrahim, 61.

Election analysts from MIC, the party which Parthiban represents, say that they are looking at between 500 to 1,500-vote victory for their candidate.

However, Umno sources believe the margin could be in the range of 1,000 to 1,200 votes.

On the other hand, opposition party sources stressed that their defeat would be much closer, by just about 500 votes at most.

There are few factors involved for these pundits to call for a close by-election tomorrow. Firstly it has to do with the internal dispute in Kuala Selangor BN.

Unhappy Umno voters

Many local leaders said that the Malay voters were not happy with the fact that the seat was given to MIC.

"It is an open secret that Kuala Selangor Umno had wanted this seat. The reason being we were not happy with the previous state assemblyperson," said one Umno leader.

The state assemblyperson he was referring to was K Sivalingam whose death on April 4 resulted in this by-election.

The reason for the unhappiness was due to Sivalingam's lack of enthusiasm to bring progress to this tiny Malay-majority seat.

"Many here had decided to abstain or cast spoilt votes when we realised that another representative from MIC would be contesting here. It is nothing against Parthiban but we think we had good grounds to ask for Umno to contest here," he added.

Only the intense campaigning by Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, Selangor Menteri Besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo and the last-minute whistle stop by Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi managed to pacify these voters to stick to BN.

Of course, their visits were topped by million-ringgit projects to the Malay areas in Ijok.

Still, it is believed that the opposition presence in these areas is still strong. In the 2004 general election, four Malay majority areas voted for the opposition and this trend looks set to repeat itself, especially due to the pull factor of PKR advisor Anwar Ibrahim.

"So what we have are angry Umno voters who have begrudgingly agreed to vote for BN and the opposition supporters who will support Khalid," said the Umno leader.

Until the very last minute, Najib's camp seriously believed that the battle for the Malay votes was still in the balance.

"If we can take at least 60 percent of the Malay votes, we will be happy," said a Najib aide when met during one of the deputy premier's ceramah last night.

The Indian voters

The place where Najib was dishing out more doles was an Indian electoral area called Tuan Mee.

Here too, the Indian voters, numbering about 800, are not pleased with Sivalingam.

Their main grouse was that Sivalingam had not fulfilled his promise to grant them land for their houses.

"He came here once in every five years, asked for our votes, promised land in return and then forgot about us," said a local resident.

PKR thought they could capitalise on this and had been running campaigns religiously here.

Until Wednesday, the voters of Tuan Mee looked set to turn their backs on BN, despite getting 200 sewing machines and newly surfaced roads.

This caused some concern for MIC, resulting in repeated trips to this estate to regain the trust of these voters. They succeeded to a certain extent with voters saying they would give BN one last chance.

However, the mission was completed tonight when Najib, accompanied by the entire MIC leadership, descended upon this tiny estate.

Najib promised the much awaited land titles for these estate workers and they in return promised to make Tuan Mee the best voting district for BN in the by-election [see video below].

"Tuan Mee was the only shaky ground for MIC as far as the Indian votes are concerned. Indian votes from the other areas were surely in BN's bag," said a MIC election analyst.

MIC president S Samy Vellu has been making rounds after rounds to convince Indian voters that "our boy" Parthiban is the right candidate, and president's campaign has been a runaway success.

Similarly, Parthiban too has been charming the local Indian voters by taking the 'local boy' route.

MIC sources told malaysiakini that they were confident of getting at least 75 percent of the Indian votes.

Worrying Chinese voters

However, sources said that the worry for BN was on how the Chinese voters would cast their ballots.

"There has always been about 1,000 opposition votes here. But the Chinese this time have been sentimentally aroused by the presence of DAP leader Lim Kit Siang. We think he may have taken away some votes," said the Najib aide.

The opposition seemed to realise this and the last leg of their campaign mirrored that with Lim passionately urging the Chinese voters to vote for Khalid with Anwar doing the same in the Malay areas.

BN sources also claimed that MCA and Gerakan had been slow to react to the swing by the Chinese voters to the opposition.

"If these two Chinese-based parties had been aggressive from the beginning, the situation could not be this bad," admitted the BN sources.

In the final analysis, what remains from the feedback from the ground is this - Indian voters look set to vote for BN, Malays voters are split with a small advantage to the ruling coalition while the Chinese voters just edging it for BN too.

"Given with what we have seen so far, we think we can pull through with a 1,200 to 1,500 majority," said one of Parthiban's aides.

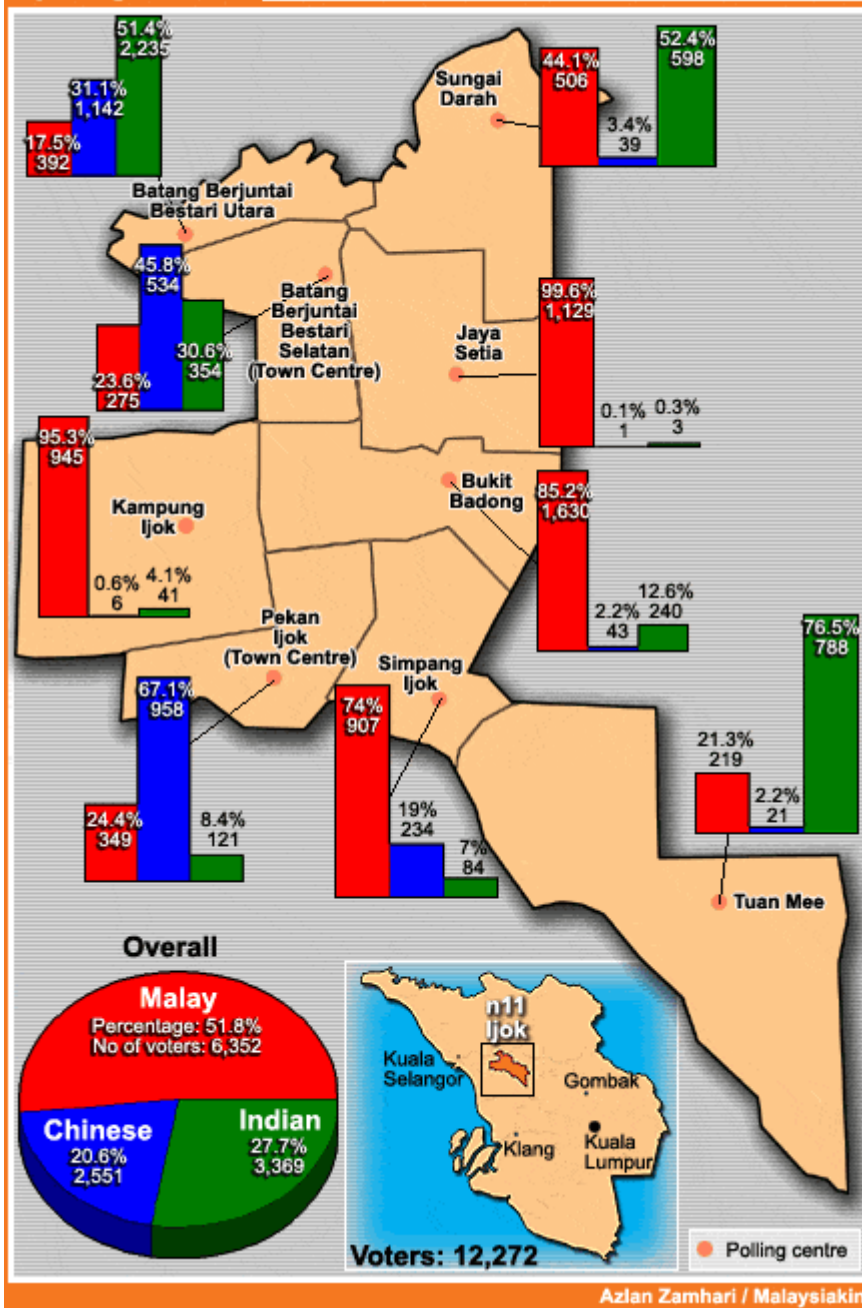
On the other side, opposition sources still believe that they have done enough to narrow the gap, with a 500-majority win on either side.

Najib's camp refused to believe this, saying that Parthiban was assured of a victory.

"As it stands, we believe in obtaining a maximum of 1,500 majority. If Anwar and Kit Siang manage to pull some votes tonight, it might just be around 500. It is still in our favour," said the deputy prime minister's aide.

All will be revealed today.

**Ijok by-election
9 polling districts**



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