

**Who really won the by-election?**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**Apr 30, 2007**  
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The people believe in Barisan Nasional and have rejected Anwar Ibrahim, trumpeted the loyalists.

Media reports on the by-election victory seemed to indicate that Saturday's contest revolved more around the opposition icon than who could best represent the people of Ijok.

Even the Tamil dailies danced to the same tune.

The MIC president's embouchure Tamil Nesan front-paged a photograph of Anwar with his hand over his mouth. The caption read: "Anwar loses. The people's verdict has shut his mouth."

Meanwhile, a commentary in an English daily likened the Parti Keadilan Rakyat advisor and former deputy premier to a conjurer of spells with the sinister motive of hoodwinking the people.

It also noted that the opposition had tried to make Ijok the conscience of the nation. But now, one cannot help but wonder if the ruling coalition is trying to turn it into the voice of the nation instead.

Are the ballots of 10,049 of the 12,272 registered voters in the state constituency, tucked among dense plantations some 50km northwest of Kuala Lumpur, reflective of the country's sentiment?

This a question for the respective spin doctors of both parties to debate over in the days to come.

### **Pawns and Queens**

One political observer, who claimed to be neutral, opined that although the ruling coalition should be commended on the victory, the results, however, were far from outstanding.

He also described candidates K Parthiban and Khalid Ibrahim as mere pawns in a contest, where the stakes were greater than who of the two would be conferred the YB (Yang Berhormat) title.

"It was a game of chess. But it was anything but fair. The opposition had one queen and all pawns. Their rival, one pawn and all queens," he said.

"In the end, Parthiban was crowned king. But in chess, the king can do little besides sheltering behind others with the hope of evading a checkmate.

"Throughout the campaigning period, the BN candidate did just that. He hid behind the ensemble of queens and smiled for the cameras."

However, he said the 38-year-old former school teacher turned politician should be given the

benefit of the doubt and be allowed to prove himself.

"Parthiban could be the best choice after all as far as the locals are concerned and hopefully, he does a better job than his predecessor (the late K Sivalingam)."

### **1-0 victory**

As for the 1,850 vote-majority, the observer turned to football to illustrate his point.

"What would be admirable, Brazil beating Malaysia 1-0 or 10-0?" he asked. " With Brazil's line-up of world-class stars, one would expect the latter right?"

"If we apply this simple analogy to Ijok, it was a 1-0 victory but the spin doctors are making it sound like a 10-0 trouncing. Furthermore, Brazil was playing Malaysia on a lopsided field," he said.

Elaborating, the observer claimed that it was nothing short of a disappointment that the ruling coalition could only garner an additional 201 votes despite introducing a new face and pushing its machinery into full-throttle.

"They poured in millions, they built new roads, re-tarred old ones, dug new drains and put up new street lights. All their top politicians even the prime minister and his deputy went to the ground. They had all the media coverage.

"For every opposition poster, there were 100 BN posters. They brought in thousands of party workers from all over the country to campaign day and night.

"And all they could manage was 200 more votes?" he added.

On the same note, he said despite the obstacles, the opposition still secured 4,034 votes. "In my book, that is an impressive figure."

Another observer attributed the victory to the ruling coalition's strategy of fielding a common man against a renowned corporate figure.

"Parthiban's credentials as a school teacher and he being portrayed as someone who sacrificed much for his family made him endearing to the locals.

"They developed a soft-spot for the boy who grew up in an estate and suffered many hardships to gain an education and be where he is now," he said.

The opposition candidate, on the other hand, bore the title 'Tan Sri' and was at the pinnacle of the corporate ladder.

"Chief executive of this and that company. Impressive track record, but how could the locals relate to him? The big shot was beyond their humble league," said the observer.

He also believes that the outcome of the Ijok by-election could prompt the government to call for a snap general election.

### **The people won**

After the announcement of BN's victory, two elderly local residents having coffee at a roadside stall offered their assessment of the by-election.

According to the retired civil servants, it was the locals, and not politicians, who had won that night.

"Look around you, look at all the development. New roads, new lights, new drains, new land titles and so much more. We won, not the politicians," said one of them while laughing.

"Some said we were being exploited by politicians, they said we were simple folks who easily fell prey to such lures. I don't think this is true," added his friend.

He said the locals, made up mostly of farmers and estate workers, managed to put their unknown town on the world map.

"We got all the top politicians whether BN or opposition, to leave their big houses and come down to our small town. We made them walk through kampungs and estates.

"We got them to entertain us with ceramah, songs and dances. They gave speeches until their throats ran dry. Pity them, they must be very tired.

"If you ask me, I think it is us who exploited the politicians," he said, adding with a smirk that his friend and him could now enjoy their coffee late into the night as the once dark roads leading to their houses that made riding their motorcycles dangerous were now brightly lit.

Even Works Minister and MIC president S Samy Vellu acknowledged this.

Upon learning of Parthiban's victory, he candidly remarked: "Ten years of development in 10 days of campaigning."

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