

What after Ijok?
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As we can see from Ijok, what voters want is centred around their needs. It is only politicians, social activists and religious groups that focus on more than just personal needs. This must be obvious. However, what everybody wants is peace and prosperity.

Therefore, for political parties to be relevant and successful, these considerations must be studied in depth. What do the people really want? The rural and urban poor, the middle-class and also the rich, employees and employers, workers and business owners of small and medium enterprise/industries - what do they really want? Pensioners and young graduates, job seekers, senior citizens, the disabled and marginalised, what do they really want? Do we appreciate that the voter landscape has changed tremendously in the past 50 years.

Even as we celebrate 50 years of Merdeka, we cannot really celebrate the uniqueness in our diversity. As a nation blessed with rich cultural aspirations of the different ethnic groupings, most of us (in all the grouping mentioned above, except the disabled) have just taken these for granted.

For the general population, this way of thinking can be acknowledged, as long as it does not affect me personally, why should I bother. Most are just concerned about issues that personally affect them. This can also be accepted. But when those with responsibility for the masses think as such... we really have a problem.

Yes, many of the concerns and issues of these constituents are being addressed by focused groups. Water, healthcare, petrol hike, toll hike, ethnic and religious issues, urban poor and rural poor, education issues, housing issues, wages issues, social ills issues, national unity and social integration. We live in an era where unless we look at all issues from an integrated approach most of the efforts by the various groups will be in vain... at least in the mid and long term.

Civil society groups have traditionally been the champions of the various issues of concerned groups. Many coalitions have even been formed to address these issues. Advocacy groups abound in numbers. Street protests have been initiated, yet we seem to be getting nowhere in so many areas. Why?

I do not claim to have the answers, and I don't. No one individual or even group can claim they have all the answers. What I know and I suspect many groups know is that we cannot continue to pursue the same course of actions as in the past. Recognising that would be a very important step to move forward. That's the first challenge. How do bring the awareness for change in the many different areas and aspects of life to resolve the many issues and concerns.

In Ijok, many concerned groups were mobilised to challenge the establishment. Much of the cooperation was spontaneous, some after some deliberation and discussions. Generally the mobilisation was successful and can be seen through the spirit, enthusiasm and energy of the many party workers, civil society groups, volunteers and friends coming together.

Even though we (PKR and friends) were like David fighting Goliath, the spirit of David's group was refreshing, encouraging and something not to be lost because of the eventual result. It

was not just another by-election. We fought Goliath and the might of the establishment machinery, and morally we won. And this is not just a philosophical statement.

On the eve of polling day, we, the opposition and our friends knew we won the hearts and minds of the masses, even though the physical votes may indicate otherwise. As many of our speakers have mentioned, "if it was a free and fair election" we definitely would have won. Yet we must not despair. Because we did win, on so many counts. Recognising and building of what we have achieved will prepare us for the real battle... the general elections.

Let's look at some of the achievements in Ijok

- * We were able to turn many fence-sitters into active participants for the 'reformasi' process through this by-election.

- * Civil society groups came together, and many experienced for the first time the synergy and energy of working in collaboration... it was invigorating.

- * Three major political parties were able to set aside minor difference whilst battling the 'real enemy'.

- * Affirmation from voters and collaborators that the 'time for change' is imminent. The change has already begun with us first. This can be seen from the above.

We must not let the 'defeat' in an unfair election demoralise us. We have at least 4,034 supporters, many who knew us for the first time. We must build on this large base of support and definitely at the next general election many more can be easily converted.

Finally, what we have achieved in Ijok should give us more reasons to find ways and means for meaningful and successful collaboration and networking. Only in this manner can we all achieve our ambitions for change and development for all. No want needs to be marginalised. We just need to come together to see how we can build from what has been initiated in Machap and achieved in Ijok.

The momentum has begun, don't lose it, just build on it! How can you be part of this process?

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