

3M strategy for an 'immoral' victory
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A day after the Ijok by-election, the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) supreme leadership council had a meeting. Although, it was our routine monthly meeting, much time was spent on analysing and discussing the by-election and the results.

Despite the defeat, party president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, advisor Anwar Ibrahim and candidate Khalid Ibrahim were in high spirits and remained optimistic about the future.

The meeting reaffirmed the party's stand, as announced by our candidate at a press conference after the results were revealed. PKR disputes the results and condemns the dirty tactics adopted by Umno-Barisan Nasional, with the help of the police and Election Commission (EC).

The party will launch a vigorous campaign, both locally and internationally, to expose these practices.

We found numerous evidences of cheating, bribery and intimidation. Many examples have been given on the Internet. Full details are being systematically gathered and compiled for preparation of an exhaustive report to be used in a campaign to expose the malpractice and call for reforms of the EC, election laws and the process of elections in Malaysia. This is to ensure that all future elections will be free and fair.

The Ijok by-election revealed that Umno-BN continues to use its 3M Strategy - Machinery, Media and Money.

M1: Machinery

As clearly evident in Ijok, with plenty of money available, Umno-BN as expected was able to mobilise quite effectively its party machinery. Although they can be admired for being able to do so, we protest strongly the use of government machinery, especially the EC and police, which continue unashamedly to serve the parties in government, instead of being independent.

The EC has failed (deliberately?) to clear the electoral rolls of phantom voters. A large number of dead persons still have their names registered as voters in Ijok. But several of them "came out" to vote, and we identified them. There were 31 voters above the age of 100 in the Ijok rolls but none of them appeared to have come out to vote. Do they really exist? If so, have their votes been cast by phantom voters?

A number of houses registered more than five and up to 15 voters at their addresses. Our party workers could not trace them. In fact, we were informed that normally, not many people live in those houses.

Furthermore, our party workers making house to house checks found that there were about 1,000 registered voters whose identity and whereabouts could not be traced, and not known to local residents.

All these constitute what could become phantom voters. When public complaints were made, the EC secretary had the cheek to say, "If they have their feet on the ground, they cannot be phantoms." Was he joking? If so, he was being irresponsible; it was certainly unbecoming for a person holding his position to joke on this serious matter.

As for the police, they came in full force – in uniform, plain clothes, on horses and in helicopters. It was announced that there were 1,500 personnel in Ijok, this works out to be one police officer for every eight voters. Even Inspector-General of Police Musa Hassan was there.

Some said he could not trust his top officers in charge of the district of Kuala Selangor and the state of Selangor. Or was he indeed, as suspected by many, carrying out some covert role in collaboration with the highest political leadership in government, to make sure Umno-BN wins?

The police disrupted at least seven PKR rallies (ceramah) with the excuse that they were held without police permits. In all cases, PKR had informed the police of their intention to hold those ceramah. It is ridiculous and undemocratic to demand for police permits during an election campaign. When applications were made for permits to hold 11 ceramah near voting day, three were rejected on the curious excuse that the deputy premier and the information department were having their functions nearby. What can be more discriminatory?

I daresay that all the police attempts to stop PKR ceramah after they begun were deliberately done as acts of provocation. From the way they were acting, it was obvious that the police wanted to provoke the organisers and the crowd to respond aggressively and cause disturbance or disorder.

They wanted to show in front of the many cameras from TV stations as well as Special Branch TV squads that PKR is a rowdy party. They were disappointed of course, because in all cases, the organisers and the crowd acted with restraint and dispersed calmly and peacefully.

There was another dubious role believed to be played by a select number of police officers not in uniform. We have been very reliably informed by certain Umno as well as police sources that they were used as phantom voters. They used false identity cards and part of over 2,000 marked ballot papers that had earlier been kept at the police stations. Most of these voters came during the last half hour of voting. Apparently, some of them even cast more than one vote. These allegations must be investigated.

M2: Media

As for the mainstream media, owned, controlled or influenced by the governing parties or their proxies, they went to town to spread government propaganda. Statements and activities of government leaders were given full coverage. But opposition leaders, especially Anwar, Lim Kit Siang and Abdul Hadi Awang, were blacked out. There were spins and disinformation galore against the PKR candidate, leaders and party.

Anwar's simple dance steps at a rally where Indian music was being played to entertain the audience was repeatedly shown on the government owned and controlled television stations. The accompanying commentary stated bluntly that Anwar as a Muslim was committing an un-Islamic act. Clearly this borders on libel, for which Anwar can take legal recourse if he chooses to.

Worse still was a clip showing the PKR candidate as purportedly calling on voters to support

Umno-BN. This was regularly aired during the news hour for several days. It might have been a genuine slip on the part of the candidate or the TV station could have cleverly removed “jangan” (don’t) from his call “Jangan undi BN ...” (don’t vote for BN) to make it sound “Undi BN ...” (vote BN).

Be that as it may, there was no doubt that the TV station acted in the most unethical and opportunistic manner to cause confusion among voters as well as many viewers outside Ijok. No opportunity was given at all to the candidate to explain. This happens because in this country, as often demonstrated especially during elections, there is hardly any free, responsible and ethical mainstream media.

M3: Money

As for the third M, Money, it was used to the fullest extent to bribe voters. There was rampant public and private bribery. Three days before nomination, Selangor Menteri Besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo announced that the state government had decided to allocate RM36 million, to be spent fully during the campaign period for improving public facilities, especially roads, drains, street lights and so forth. In the course of the campaign, Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak announced huge allocations for building a new mosque (RM5 million) and repairing an old one (RM800,000) as well as for temples and many others.

It is alleged that about RM100 million of public (more appropriately rakyat – people’s) money had been spent for all kinds of development projects aimed at buying votes. The government has not come out with any denial of this figure. Working on the basis of RM36 million, it means that about RM3,000 per head was spent for the 12,000 or so voters. Obviously, the amount spent on each voter is nearly RM9,000 per head, if calculated on the basis of RM100 million spent.

These are blatant cases of public bribery. But the EC chairperson Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman quickly explained after the RM36 million was announced, that this did not constitute bribery.

The law says so, he said. True. But certainly it is an unjust and immoral law. It discriminates against the opposition. If this kind of public bribery happened in other countries, including many in Asia, there would have been a public outcry and the government could fall. But not here.

What is less known is of course private bribery – money given through Umno-BN leaders and election workers to individual voters. A number of voters readily admitted that they were promised and given between RM100 and RM500 to vote for the MIC-BN candidate. A number even mentioned RM1,000. But the recipients are unwilling to make public disclosures for fear of being prosecuted and convicted under the law.

Implications

What are the important implications of the Ijok by-election?

First, there is a need to thoroughly expose the electoral malpractice of the Umno-BN government. At the same time, the call for reform of the EC need to be stepped up and sustained locally and internationally.

Second, during the upcoming general election, the Umno-BN will not be able to get strong

police support as in Ijok. Their financial resources for each constituency will also be limited, for public or private bribery. Can they afford to spend RM36 million even for each Parliamentary (not to say State) constituency? This would mean they need to have nearly RM8 billion to fight the general elections.

Third, if the trend of the Chinese swing to PKR, as shown in Ijok, continues and at the same time around 50 percent of Malay support is retained, then the Umno-BN position during the general elections, especially in mixed constituencies, which form important bases of their strength, will be in jeopardy. They realise this, and that is why Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced that the results of all four past by-elections must be studied. Be prepared for massive attempts to buy Chinese support till general election time.

Fourth, PKR has demonstrated in Ijok that it can get the three main parties in opposition, together with many NGOs, to forge strong electoral cooperation in support of an opposition candidate. This augurs well for the 12th general election.

Fifth, it is very clear that Anwar is now firmly committed to PKR, and he has emerged as the undisputed leader of the party and opposition. The talk about him going back to Umno should be no more. Even Umno is forced to say that it will not readmit Anwar although at no time has he applied for readmission.

Sixth, it has to be admitted that the overall organisation and electoral machinery of PKR is still weak. There is a lot to be done to improve this and it must be done quickly. If the party members, organisations and machinery are strong, it would be easy for PKR to mobilise voters to reject the 3M and rebuff all cheating, intimidation and bribery.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that PKR can stand tall because it has won a moral victory.

Despite all the odds, it still managed to win more than 41 percent of the votes cast. Morally, it is Umno-BN that lost, because of all their dirty tricks, carried out with the help of the EC and the police, have been exposed.

Although they have won all the recent by-elections, there is no doubt that when they look carefully at the general trends of voting, Umno-BN will be more than just worried. Now, PKR and its partners have to work, persevere and sacrifice to earn victory.

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