

PKR needs to address Indian issues
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I refer to the letter Ijok Results: Indians may yet pay a heavy price.

Z Ibrahim tends to blame the Indians for not voting for the opposition in the recent by-election in Ijok. It is true that majority of Indians went along with the BN for various reasons. Like Z Ibrahim, I, too, am unhappy that Indians - despite the way they have been treated by the BN in general and the MIC in particular - went on to support their oppressors.

Should we get angry with Indians or should we try to understand the situation so that the opposition can learn something for the future? While I am in agreement with Ibrahim that they should not have voted for the BN, the fact remains that PKR is not above blame. For three consecutive times, eg, at Lunas, Teluk Kemang and Ijok, PKR refused to entertain the idea of putting an Indian candidate on the grounds of its multi-racialism.

Nobody really understands what PKR's version of multi-racialism is and it remains untested to date. However, the very fact the party gave priority to Malay candidates in all the three by-elections, tells us something about PKR and its relationship to Indians. Yes, Indians are poor, exploited and marginalised by the BN, but to date, the PKR has not shown any genuine attempt to address the variety of issues faced by Indians.

In Ijok, the very fact that PKR refused to consider an Indian candidate was a blow to Indians in the district and at other places. Indians rallied around the BN or the MIC simply because they saw an attempt by PKR to erode their moral economy. It is not that the Indians detest PKR or love the BN, it is just that PKR's brand of politics was very unsettling to Indians in Ijok.

So the larger requirements of moral economy presupposes that Indians will support a political party that will not disturb their status quo. This was the primary reason why Indians went along with the BN. Needless to say, derivation of development benefits of ten years in ten days was something not forgotten.

Let us not forget that many Indians in the country supported the opposition through the Indian Progressive Front (IPF) in the 1990 elections. Let us not forget also that, historically, the most radical elements of the left were Indians, something well-recognised and accepted by the Malayan Communist Party.

Strikes in the plantations in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s were led and organised by Indians. So it is important that Ibrahim should not derive ethnic implications from his analysis of the recent Ijok by-election. If the leadership of the PKR remains glued to Malays, how can Indians support the opposition? Most importantly, PKR needs good calibre Indian leaders, not those who played tennis with Anwar or those who blindly singing the song of multi-racialism.

I believe - given my years of research and understanding of the political history of Indians and their involvement in the left-wing activities - Indians cannot be dismissed just on the basis of a simple and non-representative by-election. For that matter, even the non-registered Parti Sosialis Malaysia with almost a 95 percent Indian membership, initially refused to endorse the candidacy of Khalid Ibrahim, PKR's candidate for Ijok.

Perhaps Ibrahim wants to find out why Khalid was not liked by many Indians. Could it be that

he was their former exploiter, a person responsible for expelling a lot of Indians from plantations when he was the head of Kumpulan Guthrie?

Maybe Indians are not exploited enough, but let us not try to pass negative judgements on a community that has contributed so much in blood and tears to the development of what is known today as Malaysia.

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