

PKR needs to think outside Anwar-centric box
Malaysiakini.com
May 14, 2007
K Temoc

I refer to Premesh Chandran's article Who's the best PKR candidate? Premesh argued that if the PKR field an Indian candidate in the Ijok by-election, and Anwar Ibrahim leads the election campaign in concert with Chinese social and educationist movements, the synergy would provide PKR with a successful mega-force momentum.

It's not so much Premesh's (and thus Chandra Muzaffar's) analysis that for PKR to demonstrate its multi-ethnic credentials it should nominate an Indian as its candidate for Ijok, but more of his referral to Anwar Ibrahim as the principal influential force, and Chinese educationists as potential supplementary troops for the opposition candidate.

Look at Machap. Look at the MCA's winning majority there. Look at the gain of the DAP. Despite the attempt to scour for, squeeze out, and salvage some redeeming points from the slightly reduced winning majority, a mere 480 votes, the DAP had actually gained only a pitiful 167 votes to add to its 2004 meagre support. This is shockingly pitiful given that Merdeka Centre, a think-tank, had warned recently that two-thirds of the Chinese are likely to vote for the opposition.

Yes, one could argue that the Barisan Nasional brought its considerable machine to bear on that constituency, and threw (the public) millions every which way in the most shameful display of pork-barrelling. That's the way the Barisan Nasional had been campaigning for eons, and no one's going to be able to stop its pork-barrelling or alleged dirty tricks. That's a norm to be expected, if not accepted. In a general election, its resources may be stretched a wee more thinly, but so will the opposition's.

Machap is a Chinese majority area so the results, virtually static since 2004, must call into question either the absence of or the totally ineffectual Chinese social and educationist movements that Premesh had cited as potential friendly forces for the PKR in Ijok. As for the star attraction of the opposition campaign, Anwar Ibrahim, it appears that his contribution in Machap has once again failed to create the overly optimistic political seismic shift everyone had anticipated.

Did I lament 'once again'? Recall his campaigning in the Pengkalan Pasir by-election. In that Kelantan by-election, there was a 10,000 strong crowd at his rally which gave the impression that he might be able to galvanise the majority of the voters behind PAS. When the final vote was counted, PAS lost its seat. Pengkalan Pasir has been a constituency which could swing either way with very slim winning margin. The by-election result proved just that, which meant that Anwar Ibrahim didn't make any iota of a difference despite his crowd-attracting rallies.

The reality is that Anwar has become a mere novelty with just entertainment value for the locals. The crowd at his rally in Pengkalan Pasir as well as Machap had just congregated to hear him more out of curiosity than political conviction. Some Barisan Nasional personalities had even suggested that the crowd was 'brought' to Machap by Anwar, what with the unusually large number of strange cars and other vehicles seen at the rally.

And don't forget, apart from the disappointing results of the so-called 'Anwar magic' in Pengkalan Pasir and Machap, his campaigning was a disaster in Sarawak in May last year

too. Then PKR deputy youth chief, Shamsul Iskandar Mohd Akin had boasted: 'Di mana-mana Anwar pergi, ribuan rakyat menghadiri program beliau, baik di kawasan bandar atau luar bandar termasuk di kubu kuat BN'.

Well, that might have been so but in the end PKR won only one out of 25 seats it stood for, a pitiful success rate of 4%, while by comparison, the DAP was victorious in 50% of the seats it campaigned for. During that Sarawak campaign, Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak had unkindly described Anwar as 'a fish out of water' in Peninsula Malaysia seeking a new pond over in Sarawak and Sabah. Well then, a piscatorial Anwar had landed in a very arid Sarawak desert.

I believe that Anwar Ibrahim as the fiery magnetic reformasi pole, which drew the support of the Malaysian public some years ago, has passed its use-by date. This seems to be borne out by the disappointing failures of his four recent election and by-election campaigns, whether for PKR or the other opposition parties.

So I wonder how Premesh could suppose that an Anwar-led campaign would have worked any differently in Ijok. The PKR's prize attraction is no longer the political messiah they have been banking on to lead them to the political land of milk and honey. Maybe it is time the party think outside its Anwar-centric box., or the party won't be able to justify Premesh Chandran's description of it as in 'resurgent' mode.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/67199>