

**Khalid likely to be PKR choice for Ijok**  
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They may not achieve their objective, but the message has gotten across to the target audience - the top PKR leadership.

That could best described the outcome of the intense lobbying over the past few days by a group of leaders in the party to field an Indian candidate for the forthcoming Ijok by-election.

The lobbying led by PKR Youth vice-chief S Manikavasagam (left) appeared to hit the brick wall today as party sources indicated that the decision to field party treasurer Khalid Ibrahim is imminent.

"It's a forgone conclusion that the party would field Khalid," said the sources who explained that winning the by-election was crucial to the party.

While slightly over half of Ijok's electorate are Malays, the seat does have a sizeable Indian electorate at 28 percent, the second largest in Selangor. It is traditionally contested by MIC on behalf of the BN coalition.

In less than 24 hours, the PKR supreme council will convene and is expected to announce Khalid's candidacy shortly after.

Manikavasagam and his group is unfazed by high odds stacked against them and will continue to put pressure on the party and made their grouses well heard - that the Indian community desperately needs a greater Indian opposition voice.

**'Candidate already decided'**

The most recent measure by the group was to boycott a special meeting held today by party leader Tian Chua - the latter claimed that he met several Indian leaders to discuss election strategy.

"There is no point holding these talks. They have already decided on the candidate and will ask us to compromise (our demands). That's why we boycott the meeting," said Manikavasagam when contacted today.

According to Manikavasagam, those involved in the boycott were party Kepong division chief S Nallakarupan, Klang division chief P Krishnasamy, Segambut division chief S Maniselvam and Pahang deputy youth chief P Saravanan.

Despite their stand, Manikavasagam said he and his group would campaign for the Ijok by-election regardless of whoever the party decides to field.

"We will campaign for the candidate all the way until the election is over," he said, stressing that there are many issues which will be brought to the Indian electorate in Ijok.

He said the Indian community were highly concerned of state-led Hindu temple demolitions,

custodial death, Tamil education and the high number of Indians being incarcerated in Simpang Renggam without trial.

"That's why a lot of Indian grassroots are criticising us as a multiracial party for not putting up an Indian candidate. They are putting pressure on us to let the party know.

"During the Lunas and Teluk Kemang (both in 2000) by-elections, both seats were given to Malay candidates (from PKR) although their opponents were from MIC," he added.

### **Make allocations now**

Manikavasagam said some party leaders were also upset that Khalid was likely to be given a shot at the seat despite having joined the party only last year.

"I have been in the party for nine years. He has not been here for even nine months. Does it mean that any 'Tan Sri' who joins the party is automatically awarded a seat?" he asked.

He also refuted rumours that he and other Indian PKR leaders would quit the party should an Indian candidate not be fielded in Ijok.

"But they (the party) must promise us one thing: Spell out how many parliamentary and state assembly seats would be allocated to Indian PKR members for the next general election".

But not all Indian leaders in PKR agreed with Manikavasagam.

Party national integration bureau chief N Gobalakrishnan said by-elections were different from general elections and now was not the proper time for Indians to bargain over seats.

"The Indians have struggled a long way, but through political misrepresentation (by the MIC) they missed out on a lot. But I believe the impartial politics of PKR will fulfill the aspirations of the Indian community," said Gobalakrishnan in a statement yesterday.

Meanwhile, PKR deputy secretary-general Dr Xavier Jeyakumar said in a statement that the party was working hard to choose the best candidate to win the by-election.

"In deciding, we in PKR do not differentiate the race or the religion of the candidate but work towards the best winning formula," he said.

He said the party welcomes suggestions but hopes other parties would respect the decision made by PKR.

Previously, PAS Selangor had lobbied for the fielding of Khalid, who is from Kuala Selangor near Ijok and was a prominent corporate figure.

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