

Ex-maths tutor tallies costs of 'fat' government
Malaysiakini.com
April 18, 2007
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Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) treasurer Khalid Ibrahim remembers the maths lessons he taught schoolchildren in Jeram in the early 1960s when he was a secondary school student intent on supplementing his government scholarship with some pocket money from tuition on the side.

That experience will come in handy when he attempts to translate into simple opportunity cost calculations the effects of a decision to continue supporting Barisan Nasional by the voters of Ijok, for whose allegiance Khalid will vie as the PKR candidate in the April 28 by-election.

The schoolchildren Khalid taught were the kids of Chinese shopkeepers who hired the cash strapped but bright Malay student of Sekolah Menengah Datu Harun in nearby Tanjong Karang.

Jeram lies cheek by jowl with Ijok in the parliamentary constituency of Kuala Selangor, held by Noh Omar of BN-Umno.

The BN candidate for the vacant Ijok seat, long a bastion of the ruling coalition, is K Parthiban of MIC.

Like MBA holder Khalid, Parthiban has a Masters - in education - but it is a moot point in the days ahead which of the two candidates will do the more educating.

'Fat and flabby'

From the way Khalid expounded, in an interview with malaysiakini, on what he called "BN's politics of make-believe development", the former maths tutor has the sums tallied up to show the disjunction between BN's rhetoric and reality.

PKR is out to test its strength in a state seat whose composition - 51% Malays, 28% Indians and 21% Chinese - and semi-urban location evoke issues that will gauge receptivity to PKR's agenda of a national development transcending the BN-forged stratifications of race and religion.

"I will be trying to get the message across that the BN government is fat and flabby," said Khalid, the former CEO of Permodalan Nasional Berhad.

"Continued support for BN will mean an obese government, a slumping economy and an over-tolled and taxed citizenry," he warned.

As proof, Khalid cited the rise in the BN government's operating expenditure from RM50 billion seven years ago to RM112 billion last year.

He estimated that for every ringgit spent, as much as 50 percent was siphoned off in payments to the "rentier class."

"The way the New Economic Policy (NEP) has been implemented has resulted in the creation of a rentier class that just collects payoffs on approvals for projects, licences, what not," he claimed.

"Payoffs to this rentier class are the principal reason why the government's operating costs have grown exponentially," he asserted.

Jolt the voters

"I have to translate what this means to the voters in Ijok. In simple terms, I have to tell them voting for BN means that their children's schools would have fewer computer terminals, their districts would have fewer government built clinics, and their toll payments and fuel bills will escalate beyond their ability to meet them," said Khalid.

"It's already happening. It's for us in PKR to jolt the voters into realising that voting for BN's politics of make-believe development only means postponed pain for the rakyat. So vote PKR, the party that's against the politics of delusional development and postponed pain," he added.

How will PKR's evolving stance on the New Economic Policy - the party says the NEP is in dire need of review - play in Ijok, especially among its majority Malay voters, inured like the rest of its cohorts throughout Malaysia to a 37-year-old policy of political if not psychological necessity?

"For me national progress is a caravan cruising across the horizon," was Khalid's riposte.

"Surely nobody likes to see stragglers at the rear end of the caravan - dirty and miserable. To me poverty is an evil. It is no less so even if it has a race tag to it. "

He summed up: "For me the intellectual and spiritual poverty that makes race a qualification to receive aid is more acute than material poverty. In any case, these categories are obsolete these days. PKR is moving beyond them and we intend to take the rakyat with us."

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