

Anwar: Give our rookie a chance
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If a long serving Barisan Nasional (BN) elected representative cannot solve basic problems like water and electricity supply, why not give a political rookie the chance to do so?

This was Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) advisor Anwar Ibrahim's response to a question on how his party's candidate, Khalid Ibrahim, could help improve the under-developed town of Ijok.

Khalid will be taking on Barisan Nasional's MIC candidate K Parthiban in the April 28 by-election for the Ijok state seat.

The seat fell vacant following the death of its three-term MIC assemblyperson K Sivalingam on April 4.

"Even a MIC representation for so long could not resolve water and electricity woes, so why not give somebody else a chance to articulate this issue and bang the state government for the incompetence and marginalisation

"Selangor is supposed to be the richest and most developed state, but you have this sort of marginalised groups. (Electing Khalid) will make a difference," said Anwar.

The PKR advisor was speaking to reporters after the announcement of Khalid's candidacy at a function in Batang Berjuntai late last night.

Proven track record

Anwar said Khalid, who is the PKR treasurer, has a well-known track record in the corporate world. The 61-year-old candidate was the former chief executive officer of government-linked Permodalan Nasional Bhd and later plantation giant Guthrie Group Bhd.

"If you compare (Khalid) with the MIC candidate, that speaks volume for his (Khalid's) contribution," he added.

MIC's Parthiban, a 38-year-old political rookie, was a former Kuala Selangor district education officer.

Reports today indicated the possibility of four or more independent candidates joining in the race.

Meanwhile, Khalid, who was also present at last night's press conference, said he was confident of being able to bring development to Ijok if elected.

"I have built roads. I have also built much more sophisticated (houses) than (the houses in) our town," he said.

Khalid conceded that he was initially doubtful of his capabilities in relation to taking part in

active politics although he has been involved in the crafting of political strategies.

"But this kind of politics, I need to get real votes from voters. This is a challenge not just for me but also PKR because we will be testing our strength in facing the next general election," he said.

Earlier, Anwar said race was not a factor in choosing Khalid and the party wanted to ensure that its candidate will be able to mount an effective challenge in the by-election.

He was responding to the dissatisfaction expressed by certain quarters, including opposition parties Parti Sosialis Malaysia and Parti Reformasi Insan Malaysia (Prim).

While some called on PKR to field an Indian candidate to prove its multi-racialism, others felt that Khalid was not a suitable candidate since he had allegedly ill-treated Indian squatters during his tenure in Guthrie.

Anwar said he will hold discussions with these dissatisfied quarters to explain why PKR had picked Khalid.

DAP leaders absent

Quizzed on the absence of DAP leaders at last night's function, he said they were having a central executive committee meeting and their absence should not be misinterpreted.

PAS was represented by its deputy president Nasharuddin Mat Isa. Both parties have agreed to campaign for the PKR candidate.

Asked if he was aware of a DAP member's intention to contest as an independent, Anwar replied: "I have not been informed. If DAP wants to field someone as an independent, they will never mention that the person is a DAP candidate.

"If that person contests as an independent, that means he is independent. Even if he is a DAP member, it doesn't mean that it is DAP's stand," he said.

On whether Khalid's participation marked the end of PKR's previous decision to boycott elections to push for electoral reforms, Anwar said: "Although, I don't have faith that a thorough reform will happen, we must take part in elections to continue the protests against deception and unfairness."

During the announcement of Khalid's candidacy, numerous PKR leaders, including Anwar's wife and party president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, addressed the more than 1,000 people who turned up.

Moments before Wan Azizah made the announcement, someone from the crowd asked if the candidate was good looking, to which she replied: "Yes, he is handsome but not as handsome as Anwar."

When businessman-cum-politician S Nallakarupan was invited to speak, he asked Khalid, whom he described as "my friend in the corporate world", to join him on stage and raised his hand.

Nallakarupan, who joined PKR last year, was previously speculated as a possible candidate for the Ijok seat.

When Anwar, Wan Azizah, Khalid and Nallakarupan arrived at the function, they were greeted by a lion dance as well as the sounds of traditional Malay and Indian drums.

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