

Time to put Khalid in state assembly
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This is the season for by-elections. In a space of less than six months, we are seeing three by-elections—Batu Talam (Pahang), Machap (Malacca) and now Ijok (Selangor). All three are brought about by the untimely demise of the state assemblymen of these respective state constituencies. Now all eyes are focused on Ijok in Berjuntai Bestari (formerly Batang Berjuntai - never mind the reason behind the name change!)

The menteri besar of Selangor has already promised to pump in RM36 million to develop Ijok - a huge sum considering the small size of the constituency. For ordinary people, whose primary need is for good infrastructure, the RM36 million promised would be the best thing that can happen to their 'sleepy hollow' of Ijok.

The opposition is crying foul over the promise, because it perceives this to be a corrupt practice in elections (buying votes in a 'buy'-election?). The fact is that this sort of behaviour has been going on for over half-a-century in Malaysia since the country's independence in 1957. With such a promise, there can be no doubt that BN will be returned handsomely in this by-election.

Who says there has to be a level-playing field in any contest? This world subscribes to the notion that 'might is right'. Whoever is in power will use it to perpetuate his or her power. The age of chivalry is gone. After all, even the PM is selected by the outgoing PM, and not by his party members.

Last week, Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak criticised PKR's decision to field Khalid Ibrahim, a Malay, in a constituency with one the largest Indian electorates in the country. He says that the PKR should follow the BN way by fielding another Indian PKR member to fight against the MIC candidate.

Najib fails to understand that the purpose of a political party in a by-election (or any election for that matter) is to win. Any party will do whatever it takes to win an election. The BN has the luxury of fielding an Indian candidate because it is already in power. Even if it loses Ijok, it will remain the state government.

The PKR does not have this luxury. It has to strategise in order to make the greatest impact on the electorate. It does not have to follow the BN way in selecting its candidate.

The PKR wants to repeat its success at the Lunas (Kedah) by-election. The PKR needs to win the Ijok by-election because it will be a good barometer for the coming general election. It cannot afford to gamble in the choice of candidate just to prove it is a multiracial party. Perhaps in the general election, it can adopt a more liberal attitude in the allocation of seats to satisfy all its members - but not in a by-election.

Since Ijok is a Malay-majority district, Khalid is a candidate sent by heaven. He is a local-born, a successful Malay corporate figure and Malays can easily identify him as the man responsible for the success of Amanah Saham Bumiputra. The people of Ijok should give this man a chance to serve in the Selangor state assembly. It is time we have some dissent in the assembly which is now filled with all 'yes men'. After all, isn't this what Najib wanted when he suggested that the education system should be

revamped to eliminate rote learning?

If we want to encourage healthy discussion by tolerating dissent, then it is time to put Khalid Ibrahim in the Selangor state assembly. The state will only benefit from his presence.

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