

Ijok by-election sees 'increased religiousness'

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PKR's Khalid Ibrahim, in facing off against BN's K Parthiban in the Ijok by-election, is believed to be fighting an uphill battle to overcome the incumbent party's media and government machinery.

Now, Khalid has to face an additional 'obstacle' - he has to contend with the sudden rise in piety among BN leaders, one that cuts across the 'traditional' religious lines.

In his door-to-door visits to the business premises of Batang Berjuntai this morning, Parthiban seemed to have an edge over Khalid by way of the people's familiarity with the young MIC leader.

Some were evidently comfortable enough with Parthiban to invite him to perform prayers at a local Chinese temple, which he did with all the seriousness the occasion demanded (photo).

In other places in Ijok, the increased religiousness of BN has a concrete aspect to it.

Worshippers at Masjid Al-Awwabin, for example, were greeted with good news today that their mosque, situated several kilometers from Ijok town, had just received a windfall from the state government of RM800,000 to improve its facilities.

"On behalf of the mosque community, I would like to say we are very happy and grateful to have received the allocation," said imam Maslim Duki after making the announcement to the Friday congregation.

Maslim said their wish for state's assistance to tar the parking lot, build a mini library, improve the sound system, and expand the mosque compound, had long been unfulfilled.

"For whatever motives this money came to us, it will benefit the people and we are happy," Maslim told malaysiakini when met later.

RM5 mil for new mosque

Maslim said that in addition to Masjid Al-Awwabin, there are about five other mosques whose requests for the same assistance had also been suddenly granted over the past few days.

Among others, a completely new mosque costing RM5 million and a surau costing RM50,000 has also been approved by the state government for construction, he added.

When met later, Selangor Menteri Besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo confirmed the increased allocation and said it makes up only a small part of what the government has promised the people of Ijok.

He could not provide exact figures for all places of worship, but said the combined allocation for existing mosques may come up to about RM3.5 million.

Speaking to MCA, MIC, and Gerakan members and supporters earlier, Khir blasted Khalid and claimed the PKR candidate had never "given back" to Ijok's places of worship despite tracing his roots to the area he now seeks to be an elected rep.

Despite claims that he was a "corporate heavyweight", Khalid had not returned to the people of Ijok any of his earnings as chief executive officer either of plantations company Guthrie Group Bhd or finance institution Permodalan Nasional Bhd (PNB).

"Khalid has never given financial assistance to suraus, he has never given any support to Chinese tokong (temples), and he has never given any support to the masjids (of Ijok)!" Khir said with resounding applause by his audience.

An old school-mate of Parthiban, Mohd Azmat Ali, said he hoped the increased religiousness of the state government would also translate into continued development of Ijok as well as social development of its people.

"This windfall is good, but I hope it resumes after the elections," said Azmat.

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