

Race, religion used to woo Malays
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Barisan Nasional leaders have gone into a charm offensive to explain why the ruling coalition was fielding an Indian candidate in the April 28 Ijok by-election, a Malay-majority state constituency in Selangor.

Selangor Menteri Besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo even used religious arguments to assuage the Malay voters that voting for the BN candidate, K Parthiban, 38, will not be deemed as 'un-Islamic'.

"Some have said Muslims should not vote for a non-Muslim, this is not right," Khir told a meet-the-people session attended by about 500 people at Kampung Bukit Badong in Ijok last night.

He noted that non-Muslims, including Christians, had been appointed as leaders in Islamic history.

"It is not sinful for us to vote for Parthiban. We must make sure he can win handsomely, this is our responsibility as Muslims, don't be doubtful," he added.

Malay problems? Come and see me

He also hit hard on the opposition Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) for its affiliation with the DAP.

"What does the DAP asks for? They don't want the syariah court. Who are these people? They are the friends of (PKR candidate) Khalid Ibrahim... Allah stresses that these people are the cruel people," Khir claimed.

The Selangor Menteri Besar also appeared irritated with the opposition's election campaigns, claiming that they were making unfounded allegations without considering any religious repercussions.

"They make all sorts of allegations and attacks, that is because they are not afraid of death. If people are afraid of death, they won't dare to do such thing.

"I consulted my ulamak (religious leader) before I started campaigning here because I was afraid I will do something wrong," Khir explained.

Khir also gave assurances to the Ijok Malay voters that he would personally take care of the Malays in the state constituency should BN retained the seat.

He said he would be the 'Malay representative' for the seat.

Earlier the state Umno leader had said he would adopt the constituency if BN won the by-election.

"If there are any Malay problems, you can come and see me, I will settle it. I will be the

Malay representative here, your representative will be the Selangor Menteri Besar," he told the crowd.

'Just one seat'

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, speaking at the same function, said he did not want Parthiban to lose just because he was not a Malay.

"More than 80 percent Indians throughout the country support the BN. So when others have supported us, God wants us to be fair to them.

"Can't we just give one seat to the MIC? Umno has 30 seats and MIC only has three seats in the state," he added.

Previously there were some rumbling within the local Umno division which had wanted to field a Malay candidate for the seat which fell vacant following the sudden death of BN representative K Sivalingam on April 4.

It is believed that Umno Kuala Selangor was not impressed with Sivalingam's track record here.

However, the party hierarchy overruled this and ensured that seat should be continued to be contested by MIC.

Battle for Malay votes

The battle for the Malay voters is turning to be a key turning point in this by-election.

More than half of the 12,272 voters in Ijok are Malays - 51.8 percent. Both BN and PKR are trying to woo these voters to ensure a victory in the polls this Saturday. There are also about 27.7 percent Indians and 20.6 percent Chinese voters in Ijok.

The BN leaders are trying hard to pacify the local Malays to accept the MIC candidate, and at the same time trying to ensure that these voters do not follow their sentiments and support the PKR's Malay candidate.

In that sense this Bukit Badong area is a major battle ground for BN as in the 2004 general election, the ruling coalition lost to PKR in the Bukit Badong polling district although its candidate managed to retain the seat.

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