

Ijok residents star-struck
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"The town is simply amazing now. It is as if the television news has come to life. All the top people are here and it is really exciting!" exclaimed 26-year-old factory worker M Ravi.

The Batang Berjuntai resident, like many others, is overwhelmed by the presence of many VVIPs in the usually quiet town.

Ravi said he was returning from work on his motorcycle recently when he spotted Works Minister S Samy Vellu in a car next to him.

"I was approaching a traffic light and I casually turned to my right, and there he was. I was so surprised that I nearly crashed into the car in front of me," said the father of two.

In the run-up to the Ijok by-election on Saturday, Batang Berjuntai and its neighbouring areas have become the playground of the rich and famous.

On your left, Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, on your right former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim; speaking at the hall down the road is Samy Vellu and walking down a dimly-lit alley is Penang Chief Minister Dr Koh Tsu Koon.

Apart from the presence of luminaries, the towns are also drowning in election posters, banners and colourful lights put up by political parties.

Another long-time resident, who declined to be named, said he went to the nearby pasar petang and bumped into Najib.

"I have usually met friends or relatives there, but never the deputy prime minister. He came in a big car escorted by many policeman," said the 53-year-old lorry driver.

"I was so excited, I will remember this for the rest of my life. It was a pity I did not have a camera with me."

Security guard, A Kassim, 65, said meeting Anwar up close and hearing him speak was the highlight of his week.

"I have only seen his face in newspapers and the television, but never close. He looks good for his age and he can really speak well," he added.

Enthusiasm not shared

While many are happy to see the VIPs and all the attention the town is getting, including the newly-tarred roads and street lights, some cannot wait for the town to return to normal.

A stall owner, who acknowledged a spike in profit since party workers began to come in droves, complained that the pace was getting a little too hectic for his liking.

"There are so many outsiders, so many cars and so many policemen. There are traffic jams

and crowds everywhere. I don't even let my children go out now as it could be dangerous," he said.

"Although, I am making more money than I usually do, I can't wait for the by-election to be over and for things to go back to how it was."

The by-election for the state seat was called following the death of Barisan Nasional (BN) incumbent K Sivalingam.

BN's K Parthiban will take on Parti Keadilan Rakyat candidate Khalid Ibrahim in a straight fight.

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