

Battle for Malay votes: Umno turns to fear
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Malay votes in the upcoming Ijok by-election in Selangor is crucial and Umno has launched an all-out campaign to bag support in the Malay-dominated areas.

One of the targeted areas is Bukit Badong, a district of 1,900 voters which Keadilan won in the 2004 general election.

However, some villagers warned that the strategy employed by the ruling coalition could backfire.

According to them, the tactic of combining fear, nostalgia and the lure of a more comfortable life, could only yield short-term results.

Another stumbling block for Umno and its counterparts is that many of those aged 40 and below in Bukit Badong are hardcore opposition supporters.

Eighty-five percent of Bukit Badong residents are Malays, with Indian and Chinese villagers making up about 13 and two percent respectively.

In the 2004 general elections, the late incumbent K Sivalingam of Barisan Nasional won in the non-Malay areas of Berjuntai Bestari, Tuan Mee, Pekan Ijok and Sungai Darah.

Whereas, the opposition candidate from Parti Keadilan Rakyat Abdul Rahman Muharam won in the Malay areas of Bukit Badong and Kampung Ijuk and took half the votes in Sempang Ijok and Jaya Setia (see chart below).

The April 28 by-election will see another duel between the two parties. BN is represented by K Parthiban while PKR, Khalid Ibrahim.

Doom and disorder

For this election, Umno is said to be concentrating its campaign on Bukit Badong's older generation, painting a dismal picture of doom and disorder should the opposition party win.

"My peers have been told that things will revert to the days of old if we vote in the Keadilan (PKR) candidate," Suraji Puniran, 65, told malaysiakini when met today.

"It may or may not work with the older people. Many of them remember the huru-hara (chaos) of the Japanese occupation and communist insurgency," said Suraji, who heads the PAS Bukit Badong branch.

Another villager claimed that Umno workers told elderly villagers that if PKR wins, the ensuing social and economic unrest would deprive their children and grandchildren of education and stability.

But is this fear tactic successful?

"No!" said villager Ansor Abdullah Kamari (left). "This goes against proper Malay conduct and manners."

According to him, even the older generation of Umno members in the village are being turned off by the aggressiveness of the young campaigners. Recounting an incident that occurred last night, Ansor said elderly villagers who gathered near the PAS Bukit Badong branch for a chat were interrupted by loud young Umno workers passing in a truck.

"Gempur!' (attack!) they shouted as they passed us. It was very rude of them. Some of us sitting there were PAS (members), and some were not, but their behavior was just plain kurang ajar (rude) to all of us!" he said.

Election banners

Disgruntled BN supporter Azmi Atan, 52, (photo, below) said the fear tactic was also visible in some of the election banners put up in parts of the village.

"Patah tak tumbuh, hilang tak berganti' (What's broken cannot grow back, what's gone cannot come back'). What else is that supposed to mean?" he asked.

He said the villagers could see past the carrot-and-stick approach and would not be fooled by the cosmetic display of development projects and cash payout.

"The repairs to houses, roads, streetlights, and drains have all been done very quickly over the past several weeks since the by-election was announced.

"But these works are already showing signs of being shoddy and low quality. Holes are already appearing in some of the roads that have recently been tarred," he noted.

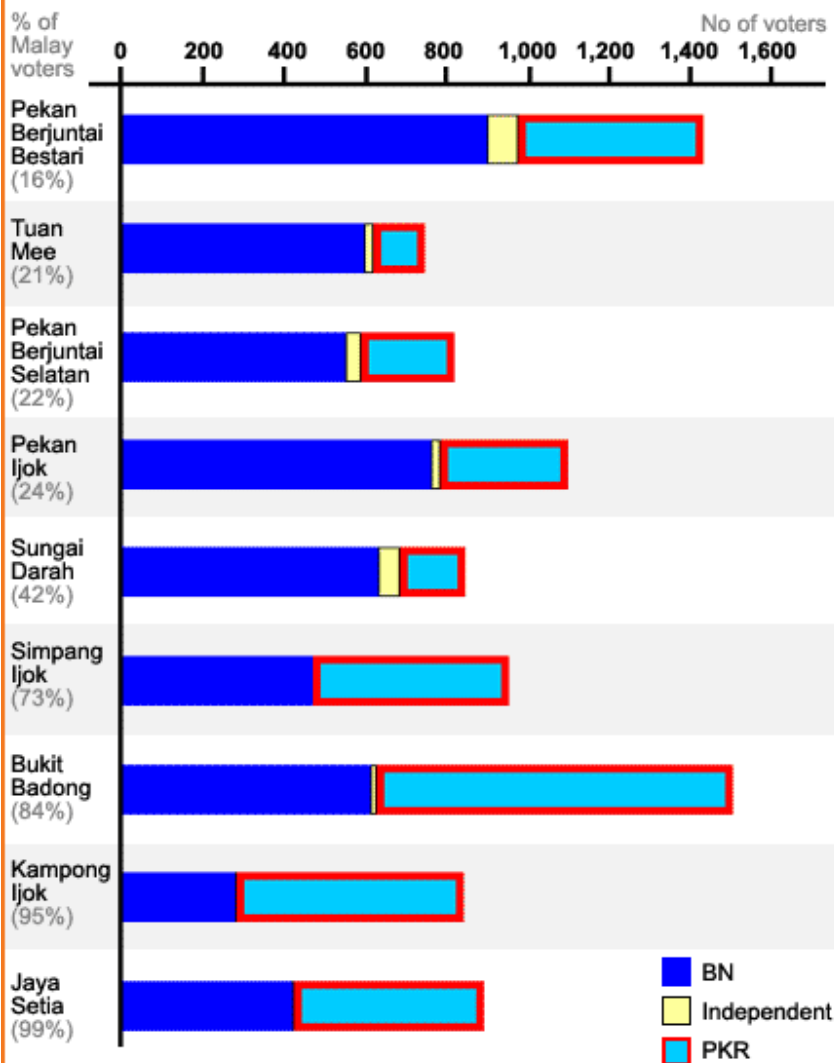
Another villager, Mohd Daim Safuan said some elderly villagers were even told they would be arrested if found to have voted for PKR.

"It took me a long time to convince one particular elderly couple, who are also disabled, that they need not be scared of voting for PKR," he said.

Ijok's political landscape

The state seat of Ijok has two major towns – Ijok and Berjuntai Bestari (formerly known as Batang Berjuntai), and is surrounded by kampongs and plantation housing communities. 95% of Chinese voters are in the two major towns. The bulk of the Malay voters are in areas around Ijok town, Jaya Setia and Bukit Badong. Most of the Indian voters are around Berjuntai Bestari and in the voting districts of Tuan Mee and Sungai Darah.

In 2004, BN won the seat by winning in non-Malay voting districts in Berjuntai Bestari, Tuan Mee, Pekan Ijok and Sungai Darah. PKR won convincingly in the two Malay areas of Bukit Badong and Kampong Ijok and took half the vote in Simpang Ijok and Jaya Setia.



Azlan Zamhari / Malaysiakini