

Development shouldn't be synonymous with by-elections

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Mat Al-Jajawi

The smear campaign has just started. The two candidates vying for the Ijok state seat in Selangor are not the ones firing the salvos. These are coming from their supporters. BN and the PKR are the two parties in the ring. The do-or-die fight has been dubbed a 'proxy fight' between Anwar Ibrahim (former DPM) and Najib Razak (current DPM).

Selangor Menteri Besar Mohd Khir Toyo, in true Malay spirit, has declared that fellow-Malay-Muslim, PKR candidate is 'a jobless lightweight' compared with the BN candidate, Cikgu Partiban. He also reminded his audience that Khalid Ibrahim became a successful corporate figure due to assistance from the Barisan government. Khalid was appointed CEO of a government-linked company, the Guthrie Group, prior to his retirement. Before that he was CEO of PNB, the agency to assist Malays to acquire shares via unit trusts.

The Malays have a special word for this 'reminder', namely, 'mengungkit' from the word 'ungkit', which does not have an exact equivalent in English. The closest I can think of in English is to remind another person that 'you are what you are because of my good deed - and don't you forget that'.

The Selangor MB went on further to say that the PKR candidate did not give back anything to the people of Ijok, such as donations to 'suraus', mosques, temples, or even Khalid's own school. Was the MB implying that the MIC candidate did all these?

Yes, political campaigns in Malaysia, especially during by-elections, can get very personal and ugly. Every juicy bit of detail about an opponent will be used to bring him or her down. The more you can dig up, the better is for you. People seem to forget a Quranic injunction that prohibits malicious accusations of others.

I will not go as far as to accuse another person, a fellow co-religionist, of not doing enough charity, for charity is often best done privately, with as little publicity as possible. In my understanding of Islam, the rewards from Allah are much greater if charity or 'sadaqah', is given anonymously.

If not given anonymously, then it should not be unduly publicised, because it leads to 'riak' (showing off). This character (sifat) is considered bad (mazmumah). 'Charity should be given by the right hand without the knowledge of the left hand'. The purpose of the act is to earn Allah's pleasure and not to seek publicity and praises.

The practice of displaying oversized, mock cheques at charity events, I believe, is not in accordance with Islamic teaching. I may be wrong here and stand to be corrected by people who are more knowledgeable than me.

The people of Ijok should be happy now that development is being poured into the district by the BN state government. They have to thank the opposition for their good fortune. If there was no contest for the seat, I don't think they will be promised RM36 million worth of development (so far). Ijok voters, please thank Dr Khir Toyo also for this.

The people of Machap, Malacca, can testify to this observation. We read in cyberspace that

some good, grateful citizens of Machap have taken up advertising space in a Chinese newspaper to thank the defeated DAP candidate 'for bringing in development' to Machap. What an irony, but it's kind of true. Batu Talam experienced the same thing, development suddenly became a buzzword in that 'sleepy hollow' too.

Why does it have to be this way? Why can't development be spread out more evenly and sincerely all over the country? Why wait for a by-election to bring development? I thought BN is synonymous with development. Now it appears that development is synonymous with by-elections. Why do we have to 'bribe' people to vote for us? No wonder it is damn difficult to combat corruption - its definition is too blurred.

The 'development card' is over-used in elections, when most of the 'development' occurs in large cities like Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Penang, JB, etc. Development is almost always associated with physical infrastructure only - like roads, highways, airports etc.

How about throwing in some human development - like education about the democratic process, press freedom, freedom of information, space for diversity of opinions, civic consciousness, etc? There is more to development than roads and drains, which are most welcome when it rains.

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