

BN generosity or insecurity?
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As the nine-day campaign period for the Ijok by-election enters its final lap, there is little doubt that the BN coalition is pulling all the stops to ensure victory.

Soon after the sun sets on Batang Berjuntai, loud music boomed from a small tent in the town area here last night as attractive singers belted out the latest Chinese pop hits.

Beside the stage lies about a dozen buffet trays licked clean by the crowd of some 200 people about 15-minutes after the master of ceremony signalled 'chow time'.

As the crowd savour the already cold mee goreng, Rawang state assemblyperson Tang See Hang lectured voters to rally behind BN for a guaranteed future.

Efforts like this to woo voters are a familiar scene across the Ijok constituency - paintball competition, live rock music, cultural performances, nine-course dinners - often attended or at least officiated by a high-ranking BN politician.

Even local Gerakan party leaders, who are better known for their low-profile campaign strategies, were caught up in the festivities by holding its first karaoke session at a temple in Ijok town last night, backed by government-owned Chinese radio station Ai-FM.

Right next door at a yet-to-be operational petrol station, some 500 people attended a function to officiate Selangor Menteri Besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo new office in Ijok.

Even though Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak was in attendance flanked by several BN component party leaders, the crowd did not have to listen to any political lectures during meal time.

Instead, they were treated with professional dance troupes and singers, much to their delight.

Insecurities fuelling spending?

All these activities come with a cost - one which cannot be afforded by local political leaders of this small semi-rural state constituency.

But what is driving such sheer amount of funding for such activities?

According to a Gerakan source, the party was ordered by their state BN superiors to organise activities in a bid to lure voters away from a series of well-attended opposition ceramah (political lectures) of late.

"This event (and a second leg on polling day eve) is even sponsored by them (state BN superiors)," said the source.

While luring voters with free food and entertainment may be acceptable to some, allegations of vote-buying with cash also surfaced last night.

A MCA source told malaysiakini that the party was on 'panic mode' to deliver votes for the BN and that certain individuals may turn to direct vote buying soon.

Selangor Parti Keadilan Rakyat deputy chief Lee Kim Sin alleged last night that the vote buying had already begun.

He told a ceramah that BN party workers were giving out RM200 per household in a housing area in Ijok yesterday.

"By all means, take the money! But on voting day, vote for us," Lee told a crowd of about 100.

Show of force

In view of the grandiosity of the BN nocturnal campaign, it is difficult for the opposition's frugal efforts to draw a crowd. This, the opposition claim, is made even more difficult when the police come in to stop their activities.

The presence of riot police in the area has become more obvious as the campaign progresses.

In a bid to stop an opposition rally last night in Batang Berjuntai, four red Federal Reserve Unit (FRU) trucks and a water cannon was deployed near the scene.

At Batu 8 Ijok, another six FRU trucks and a water cannon was seen parked near a night market organised by PAS.

"This is just crazy. We have such activities all the time. Why the show of force?" said a resident who declined to be named.

PKR Youth leader Khairul Anuar Ahmad Zainudin remarked that the amount of riot police deployed was largely disproportionate to the crowd size relative to how they handle large-scale street demonstrations in Kuala Lumpur.

The BN poster campaign has also rose several notches. Their posters seem to have doubled over the past 24 hours, overwhelming the sprinkling of PKR flags dotted throughout the area.

The most notable addition to the BN poster gallery featured Umno Youth chief Hishammuddin Hussien and his deputy Khairy Jamaluddin.

The two-storey high billboard near Bukit Badong reads, "Pemuda gempur, PKR terkubur! (Umno Youth attacks, PKR is buried)".

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