

Will the Chinese swing?
Malaysiakini.com
Apr 27, 2007
RK Anand

Eight days ago, MCA president Ong Ka Ting made a proclamation. He said his party will ensure that all 2,530 Chinese voters in Ijok endorse the BN.

Apart from the local leaders, he said the party's central leadership will also go to the ground to ensure a big win for the ruling coalition's candidate.

On the same day, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng warned that the by-election will be a test of Ong's leadership as the latter is also MCA Selangor chairperson.

"Ong realises that if DAP can achieve a swing of more than five percent of Chinese votes in Machap (MCA's strongest seat in Malacca), there is a possibility that the opposition candidate will achieve a higher swing of Chinese votes in Ijok," he said.

Now, with the by-election just 24 hours away, the MCA president is facing a tall order. Will he be able to deliver on his words?

According to certain observers, the reaction from the ground is still difficult to read while some sources claimed that MCA's internal politics has affected the party's campaign.

"The area is traditionally aligned to Team B and this has proved to be a stumbling block for the Team A president," said one source.

Due to the factionalism, the source said local party leaders appeared to move at a snail's pace to crank up their machinery.

The Chinese voters, mainly concentrated in Kampung Baru Ijok and Kampung Baru Berjantai, apparently have long standing grouses with their local MCA leaders.

Realising this problem, the source said BN has turned to Gerakan heavyweights like its president Dr Koh Tsu Koon and his predecessor Dr Lim Keng Yaik to rope in the Chinese votes.

'Not our fight'

Apart from this, a local resident pointed out that the supposedly dismal performance of Ijok's late incumbent K Sivalingam is also a disadvantage.

"We hardly saw him and we don't know much about him. So the Chinese parties cannot use his contribution as a campaign point" said the Kampung Baru Ijok resident.

The MIC incumbent's death on April 4 paved the way for the by-election which will see a straight fight between BN's K Parthiban and PKR candidate Khalid Ibrahim.

Given the fact that Malaysian politics is deeply entrenched in communalism, the resident also noted that the Chinese community does not view this election as "our fight".

"To us, it is more like an Umno-MIC lawan (versus) Keadilan (PKR) or Indian candidate lawan Malay candidate. The Chinese (BN) parties come here to campaign because they got no choice," he said.

Going by his prediction, there will be a low voter turnout among the Chinese. "We may just choose to sit at home and watch TV on polling day."

The opposition, on the other hand, have expressed confidence over the support from Chinese voters in the constituency.

Earlier this week, PKR vice-president and election bureau chief Azmin Ali said there has been a very warm response from the community.

The party's advisor Anwar Ibrahim has also used his gift for oration to stir up Chinese sentiments on mother-tongue education, the New Economic Policy and the Umno Malay hegemony.

PKR has also roped in influential veteran Chinese educationists and DAP stalwart Lim Kit Siang.

Curiosity factor

While one PKR member said the hundreds of Chinese that throng the opposition ceramah is testimony to the community's support, one observer remains unconvinced.

"The opposition has a tendency of misreading these things. At the spur of the moment, they (the community) may support you and applaud your every remark, but come polling day, they will vote differently," said the observer.

Furthermore, he said, these are rural folks with simple concerns such as drainage problems and defective street lights.

"Talking to them about corruption, transparency and integrity may not have much impact. They operate on the simple belief that to resolve their problems, they need a representative with connections and access to funds," he added.

As for the large turn-outs at opposition talks, the observer attributed this to sheer curiosity and entertainment.

"These are folks who go to bed at 10pm, now suddenly the town is abuzz with activity and there are live performances in every nook and corner.

"Why go to a BN ceramah and hear the same old rhetoric when you can attend an opposition talk and listen to some fiery speeches and juicy details. But this does not mean they will vote for the opposition," he said.

"You get to see Pak Lah (Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) and Ka Ting on the news every day, but how often do you get to see Anwar or Kit Siang, in the flesh on top of that. So the crowd is mostly driven by curiosity," he added.

However, another local resident begged to differ.

"We may be simple people, but we are not stupid. We read the newspapers, we watch the news, we know what is going on. Don't be surprised if rural folks like us turn the tables.

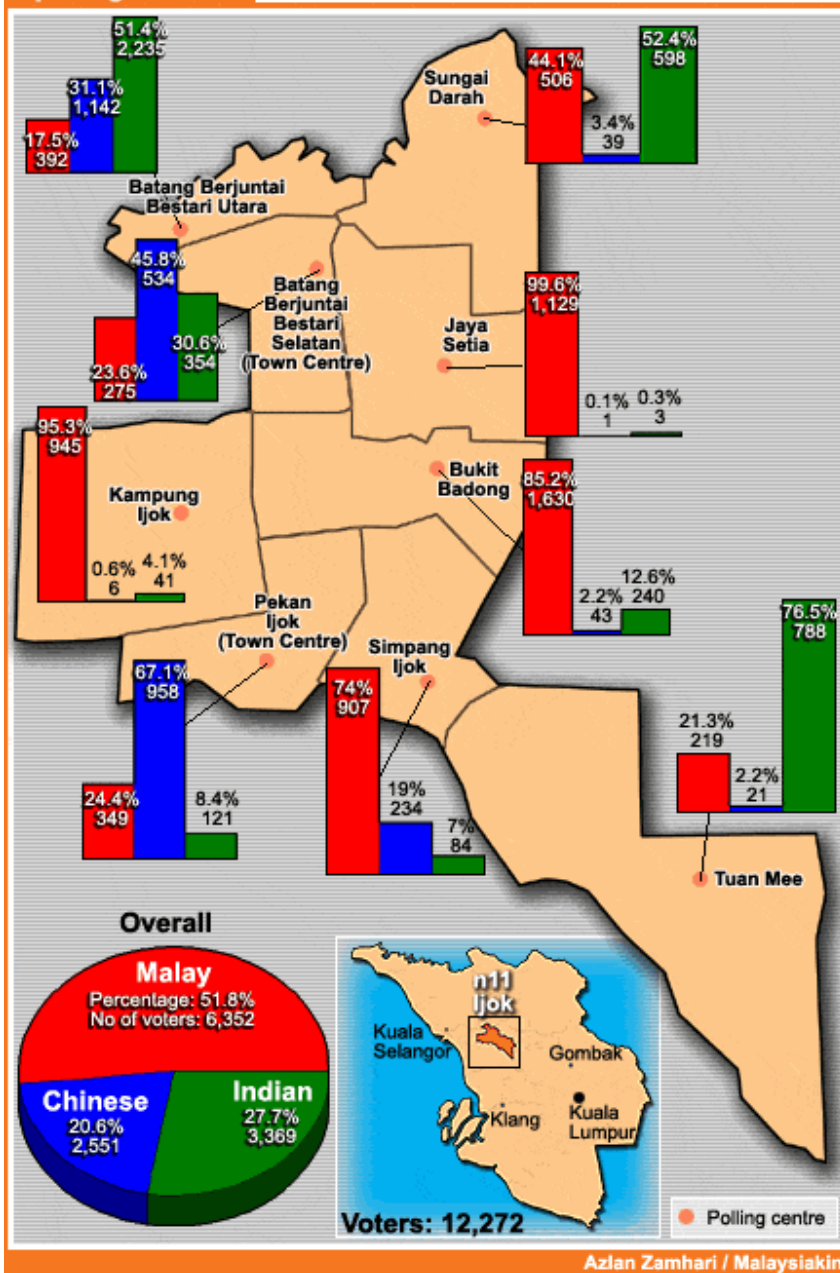
"The Chinese here may not vote for the opposition because they support the opposition. They may vote for the opposition to register their protest (against BN)," she said.

The last election revealed that PKR commands a sizeable support among the Malay electorate, who make up the majority of voters in the constituency.

As for the Indian voters, the second largest, MIC president S Samy Vellu is confident of securing at least 85 percent of their votes.

So Chinese voters may inadvertently play the role of king-maker in a contest which pundits predict will be close and every vote counts.

**Ijok by-election
9 polling districts**



Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/66532>