

Machap: Improbable but not impossible for DAP
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Beh Lih Yi

'Improbable but not impossible' was how DAP leader Lim Kit Siang recently described his party's chances of wresting the Machap state seat from Barisan Nasional in the April 12 by-election.

And in a daring attempt to achieve this improbable victory in the traditional BN stronghold, the opposition party has outlined five targets.

They are:

- * Not to lose the RM5,000 election deposit;
- * Obtaining majority of the Chinese votes;
- * Making a breakthrough in getting 35 percent Indian votes;
- * Getting 25 to 30 percent Malay votes, and
- * Winning the by-election

"If we can achieve the first four of the targets, we are then looking at a victory," DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng told malaysiakini when met in Machap during the nomination day on Tuesday.

The Machap seat fell vacant following the death of BN assemblyperson Poh Ah Tiam, 55, on March 15.

DAP's 33-year-old businessman Liou Chen Kuang will be contesting against BN's 56-year-old candidate Lai Meng Chong, a local born, in the by-election.

Liou was the losing candidate in this Chinese-majority state seat in the 2004 general election when the popular Poh garnered a 4,562-vote majority to retain the seat for the third time.

The Machap state constituency has 9,623 registered voters including 108 postal voters. The Chinese account for 45 percent of the voters, Malays 38 percent, Indians 15 percent and others two percent.

This time around BN does not just want to retain the Machap seat, it wants to win with a bigger majority so that Liou will lose his deposit.

(A candidate will lose its election deposit if the candidate receives less than one-eighth of the total votes cast).

Missing PKR bigwigs

A major challenge for the DAP is getting the support of the Malay voters that are concentrated in areas like Solok Menggong, Felda Hutan Percha, Melaka Pindah and Kemuning.

"We are relying on PKR on this (gaining the Malay votes)," said Guan Eng in reference to

opposition party Parti Keadilan Rakyat, which had expressed an intention to contest in the same seat earlier.

However PKR dropped that idea and agreed to campaign for the DAP instead.

Nevertheless, no prominent PKR national leaders were seen in Machap on nomination day. The only national level PKR leader on sight to give support for the DAP's candidate was acting PKR Youth chief Shamsul Iskandar Md Akin.

"I think they have their reasons for not attending, I will not speculate. I hope to get the co-operation from PKR but if that is not forthcoming, we will rely on the people of Machap," added the younger Lim.

PKR however pointed out that although there were no national level PKR leaders on that day, several state leaders were present to show support.

Party information bureau chief Tian Chua said that PKR has started low-key campaigning in Machap but will start sending their big boys from Sunday onwards as the party leaders were now busy preparing for the party's anniversary celebration this weekend.

"We will try our best (to campaign). We have opened an operation centre in Tebong and our workers will go to the Felda area too," he said. PKR has about 600 active members in Machap.

He said that apart from himself, other PKR leaders who will be campaigning in Machap include party treasurer Khalid Ibrahim and deputy secretary-general Dr Xavier Jeyakumar.

Asked if party advisor Anwar Ibrahim will also be present during the election campaign, Chua said he will have to discuss the matter first with Anwar, who had just returned from Saudi Arabia yesterday.

Meanwhile, Umno secretary-general Radzi Sheikh Ahmad expressed confidence in pocketing the Malay votes in the state constituency.

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