

Penang CM: Free WiFi even for BN constituencies
Malaysiakini.com
March 20, 2011

Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng hit out at national news agency Bernama and local English daily New Straits Times for saying that the state government was excluding BN constituencies from free WiFi initiatives.

Lim (left), who is DAP national secretary general, also castigated BN leaders for their 'dishonest tactic' of using their control over the media to perpetuate lies.

Lim said the state was not surprised that a paper such as New Straits Times continued to attack the state government for something it had not done but was in fact trying to correct.

"But for a national news agency like Bernama not to print the state's clarification that the free WiFi initiative is for all including those in BN parliamentary constituencies shows that general election is near and that Bernama should be known and BNnama," said Lim, in a statement today.

"The Pakatan Rakyat Penang government is for all Penangites including BN supporters," clarified Lim.

He was responding to news reports quoting Penang Telecommunications Task Force chairperson Jeff Ooi allegedly saying there was no point investing money in Kepala Batas, Tasik Gelugor and Nibong Tebal for now.

The report had whipped up a storm with several BN leaders condemning it as being "unfair", even "dangerous and childish".

Ooi, who is DAP's Jelutong MP, had reportedly said that if the state had the resources, it will provide the free service, however, the initiative is currently focussed on Pakatan-held constituencies.

"If the local people in the constituencies want WiFi, then they should vote for Pakatan, "Ooi was quoted as saying in The Star.

Good intentions twisted

Lim went on to lament that the state's good intentions to ensure free WiFi coverage for all has now been "distorted and twisted to an act of discrimination" by the Pakatan government against BN supporters.

He then clarified that the state wanted coverage throughout Penang, including BN constituencies like Kepala Batas and Tasik Gelugor when it launched its free WiFi initiative in 2009.

This initiative is an effort by the state to increase broadband penetration and digital intelligence both in the urban and rural areas to propel Penang forward as a knowledge-based economy, he said.

He added that the state managed to secure a private company Redtone, to provide free WiFi services without paying a single cent, where the latter promised to provide 750 free WiFi

hotspots without charge by relying on advertising revenues to get back their investment and capital outlay.

He explained that the state had also facilitated Redtone by exempting them from certain rules in installing their WiFi devices, where 750 free hotspots were recently fully installed this year on both Penang and the mainland.

"However the state was concerned that there were certain areas not covered by the free WiFi initiative such as the Bukit Gelugor, Nibong Tebal, Kepala Batas and Tasik Glugor parliamentary constituencies; both Bukit Gelugor and Nibong Tebal are Pakatan parliamentary seats," he said.

Veteran lawyer Karpal Singh (right) is the MP for Bukit Gelugor, while the MP for Nibong Tebal, Tan Tee Beng, has since quit PKR and joined Kita, or the People's Welfare Party.

"How can the Pakatan state government be accused of discriminating against BN supporters when even Karpal Singh's parliamentary seat is not covered by Redtone's first free WiFi initiative?" he asked.

Lim further explained that commercial considerations compelled Redtone to place the 750 WiFi hotspots only in areas where there is commercial viability.

"As this is a private enterprise offered free by the company, the state government cannot compel Redtone to cover all areas in Penang," he said.

To correct the imbalance and ensure WiFi coverage for all, the state has carried out discussions to have a joint-venture with Redtone to install an additional 750 hotspots that will cover all areas in Penang, including those areas left out earlier.

"In other words the additional 750 WiFi hotspots will result in a total of 1,500 free WiFi hotspots in Penang when fully completed," disclosed Lim.