

'PKR needs Chinese-majority seats too'
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While PKR, DAP and PAS have finalised seat allocations ahead of the Sarawak polls, PKR is still hopeful of making a last-minute swap with DAP.

PKR would like to contest a seat in three of Sarawak's biggest cities - Kuching, Sibuan and Miri.

But there is a catch. Chinese Malaysians make up the majority of the electorate in urban seats, hence prompting the DAP to lay claim to most of these seats.

The DAP is only willing to let PKR contest Senadin in Miri and Padungan in Kuching. PKR has asked for Dudong in Sibuan, but DAP is unwilling to give in.

PKR vice-president Tian Chua explained that PKR needs to maintain a minimum presence in Chinese-majority urban areas to reflect the party's multi-cultural agenda.

"The current outcome is clearly unfortunate and it will impede PKR development as a party representing multi-racial Malaysia," he said when contacted yesterday.

"At the same time, it reinforces the perception that DAP is a duplication of MCA or SUPP."

Chua stressed that - while PKR recognises DAP's strength in Chinese-majority urban areas and accepts its continuing prominence in its traditional strongholds - the Chinese-based party should expand its influence into non-Chinese areas.

"Since last year, we have been encouraging DAP to expand and contest in areas where the indigenous groups make up the majority," said Chua.

"We are willing to cooperate and support DAP so that they can have a share of non-Chinese majority seats and truly project itself to be multi-racial party."

However, during negotiations last Sunday night, the Sarawak DAP leadership was not agreeable to let PKR contest in Sibuan, claimed Chua.

He pointed out that PKR's starting point is to maintain the status quo of the 2006 state election, contesting four Chinese-majority seats - Senadin, Piasau in Miri, Padungan and Batu Kawah in Kuching.

"After a long process of negotiation, we have unfortunately been left with only Padungan and Senadin. DAP insisted on contesting the rest of the Chinese-majority seats.

"My task of negotiating with Sarawak DAP has come to an end. I can only hope that the DAP national leadership has the wisdom to intervene and rectify the situation."

Chua's statement sparked another round of argument between the two parties.

In an immediate response, DAP national publicity secretary Tony Pua (left) dismissed Chua's request, also describing him as a "little Napoleon" who has become a stumbling block to the

negotiation.

"We do not want to waste our precious time or negotiate with little Napoleons in PKR, or it will never end. As far as we are concerned, the top leadership have arrived at a decision on seat allocation and DAP will abide by the decision," Pua said in a statement.

"This is despite the fact that there is unhappiness among our leaders and grassroots that we are only contesting in 15 seats. DAP will remain disciplined to protect the wider interests of Pakatan Rakyat, Sarawakians and Malaysians at large."

PKR's 'burden'

Yesterday, Pakatan Rakyat's top leadership had announced that they had resolved some issues concerning seat allocation, with DAP and PAS to contest 15 and five seats respectively.

The remaining 51 seats are still being discussed between PKR and Snap.

A comprehensive breakdown of the seat allocation will only be announced in the next few days, giving room for further negotiation or last-minute swaps.

If only Padungan and Senadin are given to PKR, DAP would be allocated 13 out of 15 seats where the Chinese either make up the clear majority or almost half of the electorate.

A senior PKR leader, who did not want to be named, said the DAP has refused to share the party's "burden" of seats where the bumiputera make up the majority and is sticking to Chinese-majority seats to increase its chances of winning.

"Bumiputra seats are tough seats, if not strongholds of BN, but we still need to field candidates because Pakatan does not want to let BN win uncontested in these seats," said the PKR leader.

"But DAP has refused to share this burden with us. It just wants to contest the winnable seats."

However, Pua rejected the allegation.

"It is completely baseless and malicious to claim that DAP is not willing to share the 'burden' of contesting in rural Dayak/Iban seats. PKR is not even willing to concede Iban seats to Snap, what more to DAP."