

Penang DAP faces 'a dozen dangerous seats'

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By Susan Loone

EXCLUSIVE Popular perception is that the DAP in Penang will be riding into victory in the 13th general election. However, insiders say the party has identified 12 "critical" seats it must work hard on, if Pakatan Rakyat is to retain the state government.

NONETHis may come as a shock to some as only recently the party managed to collect RM500,000 at a fundraising dinner attended by about 3,000 supporters in Penang, where Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng had said "let BN eat eggs" (get zero seats).

But this assessment, said a reliable source, was based on the performance of incumbents, the quality of the opposition candidates, and the people's sentiments, which may tip the scales at the eleventh hour.

The state seats in question are Jawi (Tan Beng Huat), Padang Lalang (Tan Cheong Heng), Bagan Jermal (Lim Hock Seng), Bagan Dalam (A Tanasekran), Tanjung Bungah (Teh Yee Cheu), Pulau Tikus (Koay Teng Hai), Sungai Pinang (Koid Teng Guan), Pengkalan Kota (Lau Keng Ee), Seri Delima (RSN Rayer), Batu Lanchang (Danny Law Heng Kiang), Berapit (Lydia Ong Kok Fooi) and Paya Terubong (Yeoh Soon Hin).

Hock Seng, Danny Law and Lydia Ong are state executive councillors, who are described as "party loyalists".

"Out of the 12, four - Jawi, Tanjung Bungah, Sungai Pinang and Seri Delima - seats are at a dangerous level," said the highly placed source.

Only seven are 'safe' seats

Jawi's Tan threatened to quit the DAP in 2009 over public parking fees, Sungai Pinang's Koid and Paya Terubong's Yeoh are reportedly "weak performers" while Rayer was recently involved in a spat between DAP national chairperson Karpal Singh and state deputy chief P Ramasamy.

penang hari shaving protest 300711 dap tanjung bungah state assemblyman teh yee cheuTeh (left) is considered rather "NGO-ish" in his approach and has been quite vocal in questioning the state's hill slope development policies in his constituency - a well-known tourist belt - with the support of the Tanjung Bungah Residents Association.

Tanasekran, although viewed as a "weak" representative, could still defend his seat due to a weaker potential opponent from the MIC, which is currently distracted by an internal power struggle, said the source.

"Out of 19 state seats contested and won by DAP in 2008 only seven seats are safe - Komtar (Wei Aik), Padang Kota (Chow Kon Yeow), Air Itam (Wong Hon Wai), Sungai Puyu (Phee Boon Poh), Dato Keramat (Jagdeep Singh Deo), Prai (P Ramasamy) and Air Putih (Guan Eng)," the source added.

Five of the assemblypersons - Chow,Wong, Phee, Ramasamy and Guan Eng - are state executive councillors.

Ramasamy, also the deputy chief minister II, fresh from his quarrels with Karpal, who is Bukit Gelugor MP, is said to still enjoy the backing of Guan Eng and his father and party adviser Lim Kit Siang.

p ramasamy 160211Ramasamy (right) is expected to retain his Batu Kawan parliamentary seat but it is

uncertain if he will be able to hang on to his Prai state seat, especially after Karpal had insisted on a "one man one seat proposal", with the exception of the CM currently holding two seats.

However, the source is confident that the former UKM professor will recontest the Prai state seat to put to shame MIC's allegations that the Pakatan administration has marginalised the Indian community.

Facing the possibility of such a political scenario, it is learnt that the state DAP leadership is not wasting any time and has summoned the "affected" assemblypersons for an evaluation and interview session with the party's election preparation committee.

Top leaders like Karpal and Guan Eng are reportedly exempted from the session, which has been described as "an honest and open self-evaluation" of those who wish to recontest their seats.

Several constituencies face challenge

When contacted, the party's state election preparations director Ng Wei Aik said the sessions have been going on since Feb 26.

Ng (below) admitted that there were some constituencies where the party expects to face a "challenge" in the general election, which must be called by May next year.

NONE "Such sessions were conducted before, during the run-up to the 2008 polls but this time it is more focused on the performance of the candidates based on the feedback received from various quarters, especially those raised by the constituents," said Ng.

The sessions are conducted by a five-member panel that includes Ng, Jagdeep, Chow, who is state DAP chief and Tanjong MP, Ramasamy and Hock Seng, who is also the party's deputy state chief.

"In these sessions, we hear all the clarifications and self-evaluation straight from the horse's mouth, instead of hearing allegations from third parties," Ng told Malaysiakini in an interview yesterday.

The sessions would be completed by the end of the month and the party will have to prepare a list of potential candidates for the constituencies found to be "risky" to be proposed to the central leadership.

"The names of five non-incumbents who can be potential candidates will be suggested for every parliamentary constituency," said Ng, who is also Penang DAP secretary.

Asked if the incumbents would be replaced if found to be non-performing, Ng said it could be a challenge to do so, since the DAP had won all the 19 seats contested in 2008.

He does not rule out the possibility that even if incumbents were to be found with "bad report cards" they might still be retained in their current constituencies.

"At this juncture we may not be able to replace the incumbents in certain seats with the potential candidates due to the reaction it may cause.

"Although some incumbents may be perceived as weak, they may not necessarily lose in the election due to the DAP wow factor," Ng said.

"That is why we have to analyse and consider seriously the personalities of the affected incumbents and the party's choice of potential candidates before we decide, to ensure we win all the seats again in this election."

