

## **Penang DAP gathering on Indian issues draws support**

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**By Terence Netto**

A DAP-organised gathering to discuss issues affecting Tamil schools and burial grounds for Hindus drew a large crowd in Penang yesterday, though party leaders averse to Deputy Chief Minister P Ramasamy were conspicuous by their absence.

Some 1,000 people gathered at the Penang Chinese Town Hall in Georgetown for the conference officiated by state DAP chief and executive councilor Chow Kon Yeow.

Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, heartily cheered when he made his entrance towards the end, gave the closing remarks.

Virtually all the main Indian Malaysian leaders of the DAP, besides Ramasamy were present, including Ipoh Barat MP and national vice-chairman M Kulasegaran, and Tronoh assemblyperson and former Perak State Assembly speaker N Sivakumar.

Absent, however, were national chairperson Karpal Singh, reportedly taken ill, and RSN Rayer, the Delima assemblyperson, said to be away in Kuala Lumpur on business. Bagan Dalam assemblyperson N Thanasekaran also did not attend.

All three were embroiled in a dispute late last year with Ramasamy about the DAP pecking order with regard to the party's Indian Malaysian complement.

The controversy, triggered by disclosures on probable Indian candidates in Penang DAP's line-up for the general election supposedly made out-of-turn by Ramasamy, riled Karpal for its implied slight to the party chairperson's precedence in the matter. Rayer and Thanasekaran backed Karpal.

The matter flared briefly and embarrassingly but didn't threaten a schism as both sides deferred to the imperative of unity in the face of an approaching general election.

Away from the public gaze, though, antagonism between the disputants smouldered and the absence yesterday of the three personalities averse to Ramasamy sustained speculation that feelings rubbed raw have not yet healed.

But DAP's pursuit of Indian Malaysian electoral support proceeds regardless of its internecine feuds, with yesterday's gathering a barometer of the party's standing in the community.

Petition in support of Ambiga

Organised by its Lintang Delima branch on the island, the occasion saw signatures collected for a petition on an issue that has become a bellwether of Indian Malaysian sentiment.

This is the public harassment of Bersih co-chair and former Bar Council chairperson, Ambiga Sreenevasan, by assorted groups opposed to the electoral reform advocacy group's demonstrations.

In fact every mention of Amiga's name by the speakers yesterday drew applause from the crowd, a feature now common at opposition party gatherings where the Indian presence is sizeable.

Former ISA detainee and Hindraf exponent V Ganabathirau, active in party matters and a recent victim of campaign thuggery by bad hats in Selangor, also attended the gathering which saw speakers denounce as wanton the alleged appropriation of land supposedly allocated for Tamil schools and for Hindu burial grounds.

Recent instances of such appropriation in Penang, Perak and Selangor have set Indian nerves on edge in the localities where the issues flared.

These issues and the perceived mistreatment of Ambiga, now seemingly enjoying iconic status in the community, have placed in doubt the theory that the Indian vote, which deserted the BN in droves at the last election, has returned to the ruling coalition.

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