

## **BN can regain Penang 'with a simple majority'**

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**By Susan Loone**

INTERVIEW Penang Umno is confident that the BN can win back the state with a simple majority if component parties MCA and Gerakan deliver at least eight seats in the next general election.

Penang Umno secretary Azhar Ibrahim said based on the party's calculations, the BN has a chance of winning Penang because four years of the DAP-led state government have revealed many weaknesses.

Azhar, the Penang assemblyperson and state Opposition Leader, said BN had suffered its worst-ever loss in the 2008 polls, with Umno winning only 11 seats while its allies were slayed.

"We believe that it is not going to be as bad as 2008, where we gained the least number of seats and hit rock bottom. I don't think we can go that low again," he said in an interview.

Azhar said Wanita Umno had carried out a head-count exercise in all the constituencies and found that Umno is likely to keep its 11 state seats, as well as win at least two or three others.

Gerakan and MCA have admitted their candidates may not be able to win all the seats they contest, but feel they have a fighting chance if they target seats like Jawi and Machang Bubok on the mainland.

Jawi was formerly held by state MCA Wanita chief Tan Cheng Liang, who Azhar described as "a good and hard-working" leader.

Machang Bubok, formerly held by Gerakan state exco Toh Kin Woon, is currently held by PKR's Tan Hock Leong, who has suffered a stroke.

Machang Bubok is within PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim's parliamentary seat of Permatang Pauh, but Bukit Mertajam Umno chief Musa Sheikh Kadir is making his presence felt there, said Azhar.

Umno is focusing on the PKR-held seats of Batu Maung, held by state executive councillor Abdul Malil Abul Kassim, and Sungai Bakap, represented by Maktar Shapee.

Pakatan Rakyat, especially PKR is in a "mess" and PAS is no better, claimed Azhar, with party leaders issuing different statements to confuse the rakyat.

"One moment it is (about creating an) Islamic state, the next a softer approach like welfare state, but later they speak about hudud law. The people (in rural areas) are very confused," he said.

"If DAP national chairperson Karpal Singh opposes hudud law, the PAS spiritual leader merely says it is his own opinion. That is why we say PAS is a kuda tunggangan (tool) of DAP."

Anwar a 'spent force'

Azhar further rubbished Anwar's influence in Permatang Pauh, alleging he is now a "spent force".

Anwar's ceramah used to attract more than 2,000 people previously, he said, but only 200-300 of his hardcore supporters attend now.

The people can no longer keep up with the many allegations against Anwar, from alleged sexual misconduct to the claim that he held RM3 billion worth of assets and cash while he was deputy premier.

Azhar also condemned PKR for having the largest number of political 'departures' - 11 parliamentarians and state assemblypersons - since 2008.

"The conclusion about PKR is that it is a party that is merely waiting for time (to close shop)," he quipped.

On allegations that those who left PKR were 'bought' by Umno, Azhar laughed, saying "that is the standard script".

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