

DAP gets Malay leaders to fend off 'anti-Malay' notion

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JOHOR Entering into the second phase of the campaign, Johor Pakatan Rakyat, after building up a strong momentum with Chinese voters, is now moving more aggressively into Malay areas to quash its 'anti-Malay' perception, especially towards DAP.

Even before nomination day, Umno leaders including former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad and incumbent Johor Menteri Besar Abdul Ghani Othman have been trying to paint DAP's campaign in Johor as something that will destroy the social harmony long enjoyed by different races in the state.

Due to decades of political monopoly by BN in Johor, coupled with Pakatan's weak grassroots and publicity machinery in the state, the anti-Malay image of DAP, especially its parliamentary leader Lim Kit Siang, is something that Pakatan cannot ignore.

Last night PAS and DAP held a ceramah dubbed 'Islam, rulers and Malays protected under Pakatan Rakyat' at Taman Nusantara, a racially mixed residential area in the parliamentary constituency of Gelang Patah where DAP parliamentary leader Lim Kit Siang is contesting.

The new residential area, which is home to many civil servants in the nearby state administration centre Kota Iskandar and Chinese Johoreans who are working in Singapore, also falls into the state seat of Nusa Jaya contested by PAS vice-president Salahuddin Ayub.

The ceramah has roped in former law minister Zaid Ibrahim (left) to address a multi-racial crowd of some 1,000. He wasted no time to help Kit Siang dispel the anti-Malay allegations.

"I have known Kit Siang for a very long time, inside and outside of Parliament.

"I know him as a brave MP. I have never heard him attacking Islam or belittling Malay leaders in Parliament, never," said the former Umno minister, who was sacked for protesting the use of the Internal Security Act in 2008.

"He always talks about the issue of good governance, corruption and others. In the

past, if Mahathir (Mohamad) has succeeded in convincing Malays that Kit Siang is against the rights of Malays, that is a lie!

"How can he fight against the rights stipulated in the federal constitution? He can't," he stressed, reminding the crowd that Malays still dominate the country with a majority population of 62 percent.

Instead of being racist, Kit Siang is one of the most important leaders in the future of Malaysia, Zaid said, drawing rounds of applause from the animated crowd.

Leaflets campaign

In addition to ceramah, PAS also publishes leaflets to assure the Malay constituents that the special rights of bumiputra in the civil service, education and public scholarships, as well as the status of Islam and Malay rulers as stipulated in the federal constitution, would be guaranteed under Pakatan's rule.

The leaflets also show a table listing out the number of parliamentary seats contested by all three Pakatan parties in the 2008 general election to drive home the message that Malays remain as the dominant force in the coalition.

On PAS's side, Salahuddin's campaign seemed to have gained some momentum in the Malay urban areas which are more open to alternative information.

A PAS ceramah last night at an outdoor sports court surrounded by low-cost flats in Taman Cempaka has attracted some 400 Malay residents. Many other residents in the flat were seen following the ceramah from their windows and balconies.

Spending most of his 30-minute speech on land and housing issues faced by the Malay residents in southern Johor, Salahuddin (below) took a more aggressive approach by naming names.

"Ghani took those lands as his own reward. He makes profit from the lands," he said in accusing the state's top executive, who is seen as the main mover behind the development of Iskandar Malaysia.

The rapid development of the special economic zone in the past few years has seen a property boom in the greater Johor Bahru area, attracting local and foreign investors, especially Singaporeans.

It has not only pushed up property prices, but also more land previously occupied by squatters and Malay traditional villages have been acquired for development

projects, which has become the main thrust of PAS's campaign in the area.

As the sentiment of Chinese Johoreans largely follows the national trend, the support of Malays will be the key factor to determine whether the southern state is still the 'safe deposit' of BN.

If Pakatan can push its Malay support from the average of 20 percent in 2008 to 35 percent in this general election, with the Chinese support hitting 75 to 80 percent, it could bag as many as 10 parliamentary seats in Johor.

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