

Sarawak DAP adopts two-pronged rural strategy

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By Dukau Papau

In a serious effort to extend its influence to the rural areas, Sarawak DAP is adopting a two-pronged strategy to win over the mindset of the rural people.

According to state DAP chairperson Chong Chieng Jen (right), the strategy involves organising political education activities and alleviating the economic status of the rural people.

"We have been very successful using this two-pronged strategy in the urban areas, and we want to duplicate such successes in the rural areas," he said when announcing the formation of the Southern Rural Drive Committee (SRDC) yesterday.

"I think work has to start now considering there is a change in the political landscape of Sarawak and even in Malaysia.

"This change in political landscape is not possible without changing the mindset and the voting pattern of the rural people in Sarawak," said Chong, who is the MP for Bandar Kuching and state assemblyperson for Kota Sentosa.

He said, "We are aware of this fact and that is why our new state committee is concentrating its full effort into the rural development programme.

"We are also aware that in the rural areas people are afraid to be associated with the opposition, be it PKR or DAP or even PAS.

"DAP was faced with a similar problem with urban people, for instance in Kuching, Sibuan and Miri 10 years ago, they were scared to be seen or associated with DAP.

"However, over time and through our political education activities, the people have become aware of their democratic rights and freedom of association," he said, pointing out that there should be no fear for the people to be associated with the opposition.

"That is why we can achieve some degree of success in the urban areas. We want to duplicate such successes in the rural areas as well," he said.

"The work is an uphill task, (but) we have to start somewhere. And now is the time

to start," he said, adding that the party would adopt a two-pronged strategy to make inroads into the rural areas - organising political education activities and alleviating the economic status of the people.

Chong said that the task of SRDC, which is headed by Sri Aman DAP branch chairperson Leon Jimat Donald, is to promote the party's influence in the southern region of Sarawak where nine state seats have been identified.

The seats are Tasik Biru, Bengoh, Tarat, Kedup, Balai Ringin, Simanggang, Engkilili, Bukit Saban and Layar.

Similar panels for central and northern Sarawak

Similar committees will be set up for the central and northern regions of Sarawak where the party is eyeing 11 rural seats.

All in all, DAP expects to contest 20 Dayak seats and 12 Chinese majority seats in the coming state election.

Chong agreed with a suggestion that overlapping seat claims with PKR and PAS should be settled by November this year.

"I think the earlier, the better. If we can settle it by November, it will be much better. That will be the best scenario," he said.

He was referring to a suggestion by Sarawak PKR chairperson Baru Bian, who wanted the overlapping claims to be settled by the end of this year.

Baru Bian had claimed that last-minute announcement of candidates had affected its preparation on the ground.

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