

## **Johor no longer an Umno fortress, says Chin Tong**

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**By Ram Anand**

INTERVIEW The recent general election results in Johor proved that the southern state is no longer a fortress for Umno, said Kluang MP Liew Chin Tong, who is DAP's political strategist.

In the 13th general election, Pakatan Rakyat focused heavily on making inroads in Johor, fielding prominent leaders, such as Liew himself along with Teo Nie Ching (now Kulai MP), and DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang (now Gelang Patah MP).

NONEThey had only managed to obtain five out of the 26 parliamentary seats in the state, though it still represented a marked improvement from its sole parliament seat at the 2008 general election.

"We were hoping to win between 10 to 15 parliamentary seats. But we always said that the minimum for us in Johor was going to be five seats.

"We did win five, but PKR lost many seats with marginal differences - Pasir Gudang, Muar, Ledang, Segamat and Tebrau. DAP also lost Labis narrowly," he said during an interview with Malaysiakini last week.

The majority for BN in these six seats was between 353 and 1,967 votes.

dap kluang ceramah 200413 lim guan eng liew chin tong tan hong pin hu pang chaw suhaizan kariat khairul faiziLiew, who is considered the brain behind DAP's southern campaign, said that nobody could be blamed for Pakatan's performance, and that on the whole, the lesson to be learnt from the Johor results was that the state is not a BN fortress.

"Umno could have lost Johor. They won the state because of systemic advantages and not because of strength. They are just a paper tiger now, and their advantages will decline over time," he said.

Liew attributed BN's performance in rural areas in Johor to a commodity boom which includes increasing palm oil prices.

"Palm oil prices will not remain as high as they are right now. Without that, what would happen to the rural economy? That is a question that Umno has to answer," he said.

HNONEhowever, Liew opined that Pakatan should not go all out to win rural support alone, without consolidating their urban support.

"I don't subscribe to the idea that Pakatan should forget the urban areas and go for the rural areas. We have to consolidate urban support and we have to earn more urban support, especially urban Malay support," he said.

"People are moving. People registered as rural voters, especially the younger generation, are very likely to work in urban areas," he added.

At the same time, Liew conceded that Pakatan would need to understand agriculture and the rural community better.

"We need to strengthen our information flow from urban to rural areas. Our agenda is often seen as being too urbancentric," he mused.

Need for stronger Malay leadership

Liew conceded that the swing in Malay votes was not enough for Pakatan in Johor, but held that an additional slight swing could have resulted in Umno and BN losing the Johor state government altogether.

Pakatan won 18 state seats to BN's 38 seats in the 56-seat state legislative assembly in Johor.

However, he refuted suggestions that DAP's strong support base among the Chinese community had affected the Malay vote, especially for their allies PKR and PAS. PKR only won one parliamentary seat while PAS did not win any parliamentary seat in Johor.

"I don't think DAP affected the Malay vote. Having strong Chinese support does not mean there is a counter response from Malay voters. I don't think something like that happened," he said.

Liew however admitted that having a stronger Malay leadership for Pakatan in the state could have improved Pakatan's prospects in Johor.

NONE"We were hoping for an average of 40 percent Malay support, and in many areas we failed (to reach the target)," he said.

Before nomination day, there was speculation that current Lembah Pantai MP Nurul

Izzah Anwar would be fielded by PKR in Johor, though it did not materialise.

PAS sent their vice-president Salahuddin Ayub (left) to spearhead their Johor campaign, the only prominent Malay leader who was fielded in Johor by Pakatan. He ran for the Nusajaya state seat and the Pulai parliamentary seat but lost both races.

PKR nominated Hashim Hussein, a retired army general, for the Johor Bahru parliamentary seat, but he was still new to politics and did not attract as much Malay support as hoped and lost to veteran BN politician Shahrir Samad.

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