

**DAP's strategy missteps cost Teluk Intan**  
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ANALYSIS While DAP would point fingers at voter turnout and BN's election machinery as the reason for their defeat in the Teluk Intan, the hard truth is this:

DAP lost this by-election, BN did not win it from DAP.

The most obvious contributing factor to the narrow defeat is actually the party's misplaced strategy that simply did not connect with Teluk Intan voters and its demography.

The party's campaign theme and candidate choice, Dyana Sofya Mohd Daud, was based on the theme of breaking racial barriers and managed to capture the imagination of many around nomination day.

But what transpired after that moment inspired very little confidence from the electorate.

In short, DAP had used an urban constituency strategy to campaign in a semi-urban constituency, a mismatch that eventually cost them to lose Chinese and Indian votes that they had won in the last elections.

This problem has been attributed by some insiders to DAP's nationalisation strategy, where national leaders take the lead during a campaign like this - at the cost of opinions and insights of local leaders who understand the constituency well.

Ears not on ground

Dyana's manifesto, for example, was general and vague and offered no uniqueness to the constituency as well. She and her team had probably overlooked the fact that 65 percent of the electorate here are involved in agriculture-based industry, and issues such as GST, and national policies ring very hollow inside the estates.

A party insider admitted to Malaysiakini that neither the party campaign leaders nor Dyana "understood the demographics of Teluk Intan."

DAP's campaign kicked off amidst much anticipation, but as the days passed, their routine had become repetitive and the party made minimal foray into the Malay heartland, an Umno stronghold, despite fielding a Malay candidate.

They did not capitalise on the possibilities of using more bold strategies to introduce Dyana to the electorate.

Dyana was akin to a rough diamond, but instead of honing her, leaders ended up defending her flaws in the campaign period, and at times resorted to allowing Dyana's superficial attraction take centre stage over her substance, such as holding a programme just to allow townsfolk take "selfies" with her.

In short, while fielding Dyana was a brave and progressive decision, DAP failed to materialise that into a 12-day campaign period. The campaign itself was not bold enough - the party hardly moved away from its comfort zone.

And as in the 13th general election, the party this time had confidence due to massive turnouts at the ceramah, including one on Friday night that attracted over 10,000 people. However, as the elections have proven, the bumper crowd does not necessarily translate into votes.

Low turnout at BN events were not an indicator either. It has long been BN's tradition, even before the emergence of Pakatan Rakyat as a force, to campaign in front of small crowds, and to make house-to-house visits.

DAP, on the other hand, only started travelling into the estates in the second week of campaigning, juggling between ceramah and touch and go walkabouts in Teluk Intan's more remote areas.

Shock win for BN?

But touching base would never be enough in areas where the BN footprint has been established long ago. And Dyana's campaign theme and message offers no attraction to these outskirts voters, who at this juncture are probably looking at the candidate's offering rather than the party.

BN, while sounding cautiously optimistic, were not bullish about their chances. The new Teluk Intan MP Mah Siew Keong said he would "accept full responsibility" in the event of a loss on the morning of polling day, while Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin and Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak made no plans to come to Teluk Intan when results were announced.

When it became apparent that Mah had scored a surprise win, Umno leaders such as Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, Ahmad Maslan, and others had to rush to the tallying centre.

Mah had known about his win unofficially more than an hour earlier, but had to wait for the other leaders to come down to Teluk Intan before accompanying them to the tallying centre.

This also delayed the Election Commission's official declaration of winner by more than an hour.

While some BN component parties will try to claim credit over the win, the most obvious

winner in the by-election is Mah, and by extension, a revival for Gerakan.

Defeat, however, will put DAP back to the drawing board in terms of their strategies. It can no longer take the electorate for granted by fielding a political greenhorn in a constituency without understanding the constituency beforehand.

GE13 lessons not yet learned

And this lesson, if learned from, will go a long way in teaching Pakatan Rakyat and DAP where they went wrong in the last general election and where they need to improve by the time for the next general election.

The same Dyana strategy employed here cannot be employed in many semi-urban constituencies in the country.

While attempting to foray into BN strongholds, DAP must not lose sight of seats it has already won. A referendum on racial politics can work with an urban, educated electorate, but obviously would not connect with an electorate whose majority still relies on the mainstream media for information.

To illustrate, just as a hotel receptionist in Teluk Intan presumed the name Malaysiakini to be a political party, DAP has similarly miscalculated the demographic on this constituency and paid the price.

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