

Don't set pre-condition, DAP tells PKR
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The PKR-DAP seat talks that were to have kicked off this week appear to have foundered even before their representatives can meet.

This came about after the DAP told opposition ally PKR not to set any pre-conditions for the negotiations in their electoral pact - and even denied that any agreement had been made with the latter to start the talks this week.

"Don't talk about pre-conditions when we haven't even started talking," DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng told malaysiakini today, in reference to PKR's request to seek a revision of the seat-distribution formula.

"There must be sincerity (in the talks), otherwise there won't be an ideal outcome. I don't want to engage in this media game, let us (both parties) meet in private. This is the game they (PKR) want to play but I am not interested."

PKR vice-president and election bureau head Azmin Ali had revealed yesterday that the party is eyeing a contest in 60 parliamentary and 120 state seats in the next general election. The majority of the seats are expected to be in Penang, Selangor and Sabah.

Azmin also said the party hoped to revise the seat-distribution formula which has been used in the past. He said PKR wanted to contest more Malay- and Chinese-majority seats, which are traditionally contested by PAS and DAP respectively.

Agreeing, PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim had stressed that the previous formula should not be made a "definite rule" during the seat negotiation.

'Anwar told us differently'

Lim, however, claimed this was "different" from what Anwar had told DAP in the past.

"Anwar told DAP leaders several times that the Chinese-majority seats will be contested by the DAP. He said it not only to me, but to DAP leaders - for example, at the luncheon address (at the DAP retreat recently) and again, openly during the Machap by-election campaign," said Lim.

On the same note, Lim said he was surprised at Azmin's statement that the PKR-DAP seat talks were scheduled to start this week.

"That is news to me, so far I have not heard anything, nothing so far. If there is communication (with the DAP), it would have come from Anwar. I don't think Azmin has ever communicated with any of the DAP leaders because they would have informed me," he said.

Lim also remarked that he has "more confidence" in Anwar and PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail. He expressed hope that he could meet with Anwar prior to the seat talks so that both parties can set up a mechanism for the negotiations.

Declining to identify the negotiators who will represent DAP, Lim also sidestepped a question on PKR placing Penang as one of its front-line states. It is anticipated that both parties will contest a large number of overlapping seats in the state.

"Everyone can put Penang as its front-line state," he replied.

Responding, Azmin said his statement yesterday should not be deemed as a pre-condition.

"There is no pre-condition, we didn't impose any of that. We said we want to discuss - discuss pun tak boleh? Everyone should come and discuss with an open mind and justify their arguments," he said when contacted.

On Lim denying that negotiations will begin this week, Azmin said: "There is no confirmation yet, we will start calling them this week. It is only rational for us to start sit down as soon as possible. If the election is to be held in August, shall we start talking in September?"

PAS 'no problem'

DAP had earlier revealed it was targeting 54 parliamentary and 115 state seats pending negotiations with PKR, an increase from 44 parliamentary and 104 state seats that it had contested in the 2004 general election.

At present, the DAP has the biggest parliamentary representation among the opposition parties. It holds 12 parliamentary and 20 state seats.

PKR's parliamentary representation was slashed from five seats to one in 2004, with the sole seat being held by Wan Azizah. The party had contested 59 parliamentary and 123 state seats.

In the run-up to the 2004 campaign, the PKR-DAP seat talks were once suspended and eventually hit a brick wall over certain seats, resulting in three-cornered fights with the Barisan Nasional in several constituencies.

The signs appear more promising for the PAS-PKR seat talks.

PAS election director Mustafa Ali said his party has no problems in principle with PKR's request to contest more Malay-majority seats even though these were the PAS preserve previously.

"We can discuss anything. At the end of the day, win-ability is the most important factor. The candidate can be either from PAS or PKR," he said when contacted.

Mustafa added that he would head the PAS negotiation team, which will comprise his deputy Halim Abdul Rahman, party stalwart Hassan Shukri and Youth chief Salahuddin Ayub.