

Seat talks: PKR forms two top-level teams
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PKR has formed two teams comprising top leaders to start negotiations with its opposition allies over the distribution of seats for the coming general elections.

During a party meeting on Sunday, chaired by its de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim, PKR secretary-general Khalid Ibrahim was appointed as chief negotiator.

The rest on his team are vice-president Mustaffa Kamil Ayub, information chief Tian Chua and supreme council member Johari Abdul.

This team will hold negotiations with PKR's Barisan Alternatif (BA) ally, the Islamic-based PAS.

Meanwhile, PKR election director Azmin Ali told malaysiakini yesterday that another team, led by vice-president Dr Lee Boon Chye, will discuss with DAP.

The second team also consists of Khalid, vice-president R Sivarasa and supreme council member Dr Mansor Othman.

"The secretary-general will inform both parties that we are ready to call for a meeting. I hope we can meet and conclude the talks as early as possible, hopefully by mid-July," said Azmin, who is also vice-president.

According to him, the decision to choose senior party leaders for the negotiation teams this time around was to ensure that the talks proceed smoothly and efficiently.

"We have learnt our lesson," said Azmin, referring to the previous seat talks which had faced several setbacks. Among the reasons cited for this was that negotiators were "indecisive."

Overlapping seats

He said the party has identified some 20 to 25 overlapping parliamentary seats which needed to be ironed out with PAS and DAP.

It is believed that there will be an increase in overlapping seats between PKR and DAP as both parties are eyeing more seats this time around.

Azmin said Sunday's meeting also endorsed a list of 40 parliamentary seats in the Peninsula - classified as "winnable" - to be contested by PKR in the next election.

"The 40 seats are 'clean' seats, which means there is no overlapping with any other opposition party. Out of this, we will start giving special focus on 26 seats starting today.

"(The election machinery for) the remaining 14 seats will be put on hold pending further assessment as required by the political bureau," added Azmin, who declined to reveal the list.

As for Sabah and Sarawak, he said PKR leaders in both states have been given a week to submit their reports and the seats they intend to contest.

Meanwhile, Lee, PKR's chief negotiator with DAP, expressed hope that DAP will also be represented by senior party leaders in order to reach quick decisions.

"We hope the spirit between PKR and DAP from the co-operation in the Machap and Ijok by-elections will carry on till the general elections," said Lee, who expects the parties to meet as early as next week.

'Don't waste time'

However, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng, when contacted for a response, reiterated his earlier request to meet with Anwar regarding the setting up of a "new mechanism."

Declining to go into details of the "new mechanism", he said it will make the negotiations "more systematic and thorough."

"If there is any problem that cannot be sorted out by the (negotiation) teams, then it will be sorted out by me and Anwar or (PKR president) (Dr) Wan Azizah (Wan Ismail)," he added.

According to party sources, little is known about Lim's proposal or intentions.

"We have no clue on what he is intending to do, we have repeatedly asked him on the progress of the seat talks. The real number of problematic seats is small, we should not waste too much time negotiating, we should just wind up the talks quickly in order to start working on the ground," he stressed.

According to the source, the problematic parliamentary seats are likely to be Puchong and Petaling Jaya Selatan in Selangor, as well as Taiping and Teluk Intan in Perak.

However, he said the real battle between the two opposition parties will be for the seats in Sabah and Sarawak.

Previously, DAP expressed unhappiness with PKR's request to review the seat distribution formula after the latter said it wanted to contest in more Malay- or Chinese-majority seats.

Things looked more promising for the PKR-PAS talks as the Islamic party's chief negotiator Mustafa Ali said he has no problem in principle with PKR's request.

DAP is eyeing 54 parliamentary and 115 state seats, while PKR is reportedly targeting 60 parliamentary and 120 state seats.

In another development, the PKR supreme council, which met on Sunday as well, has announced the new line-up for its state chiefs in the Peninsula which saw six new faces on the list.

The six are Nasaruddin Sidek (Perlis), Farid Zakaria (Kedah), Dr Zainal Abidin Ahmad (Selangor), Abdul Razak Ahmad (Johor), Azman Zainal Abidin (Federal Territory) and Mustaffa Kamil Ayub (Terengganu).