

Opposition mulls strategy for mixed seats
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Penang DAP secretary Danny Law Heng Kiang has outlined factors that the opposition front must rectify soon if they are to capture the imagination of voters in semi-rural or semi-urban mixed seats.

"Constituents in such seats are more concerned with bread-and-butter issues than with human rights or press freedom," he said.

Among Penang's 13 parliamentary seats, Permatang Pauh, Nibong Tebal, Batu Kawan and Bayan Baru are mixed areas.

Of the 15 mixed state seats, Bagan Dalam, Batu Uban, Perai, Bukit Tengah, Jawi, Pantai Jerejak, Macang Bubuk, Padang Lalang and Berapit have a Chinese majority, while Permatang Pasir, Penanti, Seberang Jaya, Batu Maung and Bayan Lepas are Malay-majority areas.

Law hinted that the opposition would outline a balanced strategy to win in mixed areas, when the next general election is called.

"We have to find a different formula to win over voters in these areas," he told malaysiakini.

However, he acknowledged that the lack of human and financial resources and shortage of capable local candidates would have an impact on the outcome.

Malaysian Voters Union spokesperson BK Ong attributed the failure of opposition candidates to win mixed constituencies to their inability to overcome the Barisan Nasional (BN) brand of communal politics.

"The opposition is being forced to play the communal card as well, As such, voters remain (in a) communal (frame of mind) and the (situation does not change)," he said.

He said the "choice of wrong issues and wrong candidates" and tendency to under-estimate the significance of Indian votes have contributed to the electoral reverses of opposition parties.

For instance, he said PKR would have fared better in the recent Ijok by-election if it had nominated an Indian candidate.

"Unlike BN, the opposition has always overlooked the importance of Indian votes in snatching victory in marginal seats. It's time to change this attitude," he said.

State of politics

Political analysts have predicted the opposition will capture several urban seats on the basis of an anticipated five to 10 percent swing in votes among Chinese voters.

However, Penang PKR deputy chairman Cheah Kah Peng said this would not be enough for the

opposition to win in mixed areas.

"Minority votes, such as those of the Indians, are as important as the majority votes in these areas," he said.

He said the opposition lags far behind the BN in terms of financial strength, human resources, pool of local candidates and access to the media.

"This is the sad state of Malaysian politics. The opposition has to fight against the odds to win," he added.

Speculation is growing over a snap election being called this year, although the government's mandate does not expire until 2009.

In the last election, the opposition was trounced in all but two of the Penang's 40 state seats.

The DAP won the Chinese-majority Sungai Puyu constituency while the PAS retained its semi-rural Malay-dominated Permatang Pasir mixed seat.

The DAP fared better in the parliamentary contest by winning four of seven seats that it contested. Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) won only the Permatang Pauh seat from the five constituencies where it put up candidates.

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