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Malay tsunami – fact or psywar?

DAP has been talking about a Malay tsunami that will carry Pakatan Harapan to power. But without PAS in the coalition, where is the giant wave of Malay votes going to come from?

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THERE are signs that DAP leader Lim Kit Siang is gearing up for another attempt at shock-and-awe in the coming general election.

The buzz around the opposition circles in Johor is that the man often described as the “DAP supremo” is eyeing the Johor Baru parliamentary seat. It will be his most risky political adventure ever because he will be going where he has never gone before, that is, contesting a Malay-majority seat.

Up till early this year, the Gelang Patah MP was exploring the possibility of returning to Penang. He had been making his presence felt at a string of state government functions, alongside his Chief Minister son and other state exco members.

He was testing the waters but the currents were not encouraging. He has since cut back his appearances in Penang and it looks like it is back to Johor for him. It also means that he is committed to Pakatan Harapan’s plan to capture Johor.

Johor Baru is one of those mixed seats with 52% Malays, 43% Chinese and 5% from other races. DAP will have unparalleled bragging rights if Lim, 76, takes the capital of Johor.

But he will have to ride on the Chinese vote. He will struggle in a one-to-one fight against Barisan Nasional because he is unlikely to win the Malay vote. But he will have an easier time if PAS jumps in and splits the Malay vote in a three-cornered fight.

The Barisan side is aware of the danger ahead and there have been efforts to persuade Johor Baru MP Tan Sri Shahrir Samad to forget about his retirement plans and stay on to defend the seat.

It will be a thriller or, to borrow from Lim’s favourite slogan, a do-or-die contest. It will bring the Chinese out in droves to attend the DAP *ceramah* and to do their part to save Lim.

In fact, Lim’s political longevity has been a result of his instinctive ability to convince the Chinese that every election is a do-or-die mission to save Malaysia from one calamity or another. It is an over-used sales pitch but it seems to work for him.

His career for much of the 1980s and 1990s was about saving Malaysia from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad although it is a different story now that the two old foes have become new friends.

Lim has also been talking about a Malay tsunami that will cause Kedah, Perak and Johor to fall to Pakatan in the general election.

He said the Malay tsunami will also enable Pakatan to win Putrajaya with 113 out of 222 parliamentary seats. It means a government holding on with a majority of only two seats

which sceptics say will last maybe two weeks.

Lim did not define how the Malay tsunami would happen but his hypothesis seems to be based on the hope of a 10% Malay vote swing and 5% non-Malay vote swing.

The Malay tsunami story drew quite a bit of interest. The trouble was that most people had trouble



Brickbats and bouquets: Lim’s assertion that the Mahathir factor will cause Kedah, Perak and Johor to fall has drawn mixed opinions ranging from applause and support to claims that the DAP leader is delusional.



Khaw: DAP’s claim of Malay wave is aimed at energising their Chinese base.



Abdul Rashid: He is moving from running elections to contesting a seat.



Dr Wee: What is the hidden objective behind DAP’s Malay tsunami theory?

To political commentator Khaw Veon Szu, the Malay tsunami story sounds more like psywar than a prediction based on facts and findings.

“On what assumption would the Malay vote swing to Pakatan? Pakatan cannot talk about a Malay tsunami while ignoring the PAS factor. It’s a fatal omission, a big hole in their grand design,” said Khaw.

Dr Mahathir, said Khaw, is able to attract Malay votes to Pakatan but he also repels voters who cannot come to terms with his past.

“He will win some, he will lose some,” said Khaw.

Some think that Lim is either delusional or in self-denial. Others think that given his problematic image among the Malays, he is the wrong person to talk about a Malay tsunami and it could instead send the Malays running in the opposition direction.

“The tsunami thing is not aimed at the Malays but at their Chinese base. They can see that the Chinese base is softening around the edges and they need to energise their core support especially in Johor,” said Khaw.

The Chinese electorate, said a think-tank head, has grown lethargic, fed-up and tired of the non-stop politicking.

“If you talk to the thinking Chinese, they are stunned that Mahathir can just cross over like that to become the leader of the opposition. When he starts talking about better governance, they become even more incredulous.

“This is not like Anwar Ibrahim. He was a victim, he went to jail and his reform narrative is more believable. Moreover, Mahathir has not uttered a word about moderation or about pushing back the Islamic agenda which is what the

Chinese want to hear from a Malay leader,” said the think-tank head.

Given that PAS has a hardcore support of around 20% among the Malay electorate, the Malay vote swing is more likely to swing away from Pakatan in the general election.

The PAS propaganda that DAP is anti-Islam and anti-Malay has been quite relentless.

As for the non-Malay support, Pakatan captured about 85% of the Chinese vote in 2013. Lim’s hypothesis of an additional 5% swing means that he is expecting 90% Chinese support in the next general election which sounds terribly ambitious.

DAP’s quest in Johor goes beyond just an attempt to capture the state, its aim is also to take down MCA in Johor.

MCA deputy president Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong said the hidden objective behind DAP’s Malay tsunami theory is to compensate the Chinese who feel let down that DAP, which has the most seats, is unable to lead Pakatan whereas the party with only one Parliament and two state seats is sitting on top.

“They are telling the Chinese, you are the kingmaker because the Malay vote is split, you can play a pivotal role. They also need to justify why they have to work with the man whom they called a racist and other bad names. They need people to forget Mahathir’s past by telling them he can bring the Malay tsunami,” said Dr Wee.

So is Dr Mahathir the tsunami man?

Parti Pribumi is fortunate that it has not been tested like Amanah.

Many people had high hopes on Amanah, thinking it would replace PAS. Their *ceramah* were also drawing good crowds and they had started to venture into the Felda schemes. They seemed to be flushed with funds, their gatherings were filled with people in smart orange shirts.

But their image sank after the Sungai Besar and Kuala Kangsar by-elections. Amanah failed to command the Malay votes and was heavily dependent on DAP to bring in the Chinese votes.

Parti Pribumi’s test will only come in the general election and, in the meanwhile, most people are prepared to give it the benefit of the doubt.

But not Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz though.

“What Malay tsunami? It’s just a DAP dream, the Malay votes will be divided between Umno and PAS. Even in Pagoh, they (Parti Pribumi) are going to lose there. You think PAS will give them a free ride over there?” he said.

The Tourism and Culture Minister, who rarely minces his words, said Mahathir will lose if he tries to contest in Langkawi and that Barisan may win even more seats in Johor, Perak and Kedah in the event of three-cornered fights. DAP’s Malay tsunami story has quite little to do with the Malay audience and a lot to do with keeping the Chinese tsunami rolling through the next general election.

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Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz

believing it.

For instance, the common query was: Where is Pakatan’s Malay tsunami going to come from now that PAS is not around to deliver the Malay votes?

Former Election Commission chairman Tan Sri Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman admitted that PAS is still a force to reckon with in Malay states.

“But we (Parti Pribumi) will play a leading role in taking Malay votes away from Umno,” said Abdul Rashid, who is now a vice-president of Parti Pribumi and who will be moving from running elections to

contesting in an election.

Lim, said a DAP insider, is banking on Dr Mahathir to neutralise the PAS influence and even to wipe out PAS in certain states like Penang.

“Kit Siang is not stupid, he does not trust Mahathir but he is putting his chips on Mahathir creating a political momentum,” said the insider.

A high-ranking DAP leader from Kuala Lumpur has however cautioned his party: “Much as we talk about a Malay tsunami, we have to make sure we don’t lose our Chinese tsunami.”