

Has Barisan Nasional Done Enough To Battle It Out In Selangor?

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KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 7 (Bernama) -- As it stands, Selangor remains the toughest state for either side of the political divide to wrest control in the next general election.

For that reason, the race for Selangor has begun in earnest with Barisan Nasional (BN) embarking on various strategies. Its latest campaign, 'Sayangi Selangor, Yakini BN' (Love Selangor, Have Confidence in BN), enters the final push for the state with weekly programmes in various constituencies.

Prime Minister and BN chairman Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who is also Selangor BN liaison chief, has openly stated that he wants BN to win back the country's most developed state.

While the recently-concluded Umno General Assembly seems to put the fighting spirit back into the largest BN component party, especially its members having a better sense of purpose about wresting back Selangor, some political observers are wondering whether BN components are doing enough to get the voters' support.

Selangor's electorate is said to be the most sophisticated and discerning in the country, as reflected by the relatively high Internet penetration and well-educated population.

Of the 56 state seats in Selangor, an estimated 60 per cent are solidly Malay-majority constituencies while the rest are either Chinese-majority or mixed seats. BN currently has 20 seats and it needs only nine more to regain power.

Of the seats up for grabs, 35 are for Umno to contest, 14 for MCA, four for Gerakan and three for MIC.

In the 2008 general election, Umno won 18 of the 35 seats it contested while Gerakan and MIC, contesting four and three seats, respectively, failed to capture even one.

MCA secured only two of the 14 state seats and one of the seven parliamentary seats it contested.

State Umno leaders have hinted that there are signs in many places that the Malay ground has begun to turn in Umno's favour. However, of concern are areas where Chinese voters account for a substantial number. The Chinese make up about 34 per cent of voters in Selangor while Malays account for 49 per cent and Indians, about 14 per cent.

Some questions beg to be answered. What have Umno's counterparts done to make up for lost ground since the last general election? Have MCA, Gerakan and MIC made good progress since then?

An internal survey in BN indicates a significant swing to BN by Malay and Indian voters although the Chinese are still taking a 'wait-and-see' attitude.

Given this situation, it is incumbent upon MCA and Gerakan to do more. Have they?

A divisional leader from one of the BN component parties claimed that MCA and Gerakan members do not seem to be working hard enough while MIC members have at least, been doing something to reach out to Indian voters.

Selangor BN information chief Datuk Yap Pian Hon said the reason for such a misconception was that there was not much publicity in the mainstream English or Malay language newspapers.

"But you can see our programmes in the Chinese newspapers, sometimes even politicians from both sides (MCA and Gerakan) appear at the same function," he said.

"When one doesn't see the news in the Malay or English language newspapers, there is a tendency to believe that other parties, besides Umno, are not doing anything when actually, we (MCA) have been carrying out a lot of activities with the (Chinese) community," he said.

Yap said that another reason for MCA programmes not attracting media coverage was that they included small group activities like dialogues with the community.

For Selangor MCA secretary Wong Koon Moon, he believes the lack of effective fund distribution to BN component parties has hampered efforts to reach out to more people.

"If you have a good coordinator, then the funding will be equally distributed among all the components," he said, explaining the need for fair and effective distribution of funds.

"I give you an example. When a Chinese organisation invites you for a fund-raising dinner, obviously it is asking for contributions. Even if you can't give much, at least, some amount will do. However, without such allocations, how are you going to contribute at all?," asked the Kuala Kubu Baharu state assemblyman.

Some BN component leaders in the state also shared similar opinions.

They claimed that in some of the constituencies where the BN had been defeated, there were meagre allocations or none at all.

To make matters worse, there were also allegations that some politicians from other component parties had asked their political colleagues to make way and give up their seats since their chances were considered "slim".

"If such is the mentality, how do you want those in the grassroots to reach out to the voters?," asked a BN component leader at a divisional level, who declined to be identified.

In addition, some state BN insiders have conceded that some state leaders had not been doing much to win back the hearts of the voters, especially in areas which had fallen to the Opposition.

Even MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek was reported to have publicly expressed that some MCA leaders in Selangor were "lazy" and were not performing up to expectations.

As the general election draws near, some political pundits feel there is still room to make up for lost time.

Or, is it a little too late, already?

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