

DAP courts Umno veterans to blunt anti-Malay attacks
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 28 — DAP has approached several Malay figures including at least two Umno veterans in a bid to reverse eroding support from the community after repeated accusations of being anti-Malay from the ruling party.

The Malaysian Insider understands that influential bloggers Datuk Mohd Ariff Sabri Abdul Aziz, who is also former Pulau Manis assemblyman and Aspan Alias, a Negri Sembilan Umno veteran, have been invited by DAP to join its ranks, with a view to contest in the next general elections.

Mohd Ariff's blogging pseudonym is Sakmongkol AK47.

DAP Youth chief Anthony Loke, who is informally tasked with increasing Malay support along with strategists Liew Chin Tong and Zairil Khir Johari, confirmed the duo have been approached to join the party.

"We approached them but no decision has been made. But there is no condition that they must run in elections. That is a secondary concern," the Rasah MP said when contacted.

Loke added that for now, the party was happy that both veterans have been publicly critical of Umno and Barisan Nasional (BN) in their blog postings.

Both attended a social media convention called "Friends of Penang" organised by Zairil two weekends ago.

"We want to reach out to influential people on social media. But we are not building a cybertrooper army. Unlike Umno, we can't pay and friends can't be bought," he said but refused to comment on whether the two would be joining the party.

Zairil, son of Umno's former Education Minister Tan Sri Khir Johari, was himself recruited as secretary general Lim Guan Eng's political secretary early this year in what was widely seen as a move to burnish the mainly Chinese DAP's multiracial credentials.

But DAP and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leaders admitted in a recent report by The Malaysian Insider that Umno's attacks have hurt the opposition's Malay support base.

The Malaysian Insider also reported in October that a survey commissioned by DAP showed Malay support in Penang, where it leads the state government, has dipped to 30 per cent, down from nearly 50 per cent just a few months after Lim took office as chief minister in 2008.

Umno has repeatedly accused PR, especially DAP, of being anti-Malay, most recently when at its general assembly where several delegates and leaders including deputy president Tan Sri Muhyiddin said the opposition was anti-Malay, anti-Islam, agents of Christianisation and disrespectful to Malay rulers.

Umno's newspaper Utusan Malaysia also claimed earlier this year that DAP had conspired with the Church to turn Malaysia into a Christian state.

DAP has tried to reach out to Malays by recruiting Malay leaders such as Transparency International Malaysia founder Tunku Abdul Aziz Tunku Ibrahim who is now the party's vice chairman.

The Malaysian Insider also understands DAP leaders have been meeting Malay opinion-makers in small closed-door discussions dealing with issues concerning an Islamic state, hudud and Bumiputera affirmative action.

Recruiting Mohd Ariff Sabri, would be a major coup for the party as he was an assemblyman up to 2008 and was information chief in Datuk Seri Najib Razak's Pekan division up to 2004.

Aspan Alias has been stridently critical of the ruling coalition in the past few years, and rumours of his move to DAP were ignited among bloggers after he was reported to have spoken at a DAP dinner in Tampin, Negri Sembilan earlier this year.

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