

**Penang BN to focus on 18 'critical seats', says Koh**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**August 28, 2011**  
**By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal**

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 28 — Penang Barisan Nasional (BN) is focused on regaining and retaining 18 "critical" state seats in the next polls, as state coalition chief Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon believes they are crucial to winning back the state.

Koh was chief minister from 1990 until the political tsunami of March 2008 — when Pakatan Rakyat (PR) won 29 out of the total 40 state seats in the state. DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng replaced him.

"Of the 11 seats BN has won in March 2008, there are six seats which we won by less than the 600 vote margin. We have to first defend this.

Then there are seven seats which we lost by less than 2000 vote margin, have to try and win back these seats. We also have five seats which we lost less than the 3000 majority margin.

"So we are talking about critical seats altogether of 18 that we have to work very hard on. That's our target we are working on this. 18 critical seats," Koh (picture) told The Malaysian Insider in an exclusive interview.

The six seats won by BN by less than a 600 vote margin are Telok Bahang, Pulau Betong, Bayan Lepas, Sungai Acheh, Seberang Jaya and Sungai Dua. The seven seats BN lost by less than a 2000 vote margin are Bukit Tengah, Tanjung Bungah, Pulau Tikus, Padang Kota, Datuk Keramat, Batu Uban and Pantai Jerejak. The five seats BN lost by less than a 3000 vote margin are Penanti, Sungai Bakap, Sungai Pinang, Seri Delima and Air Itam.

"I'm not going to claim that we will win. Neither am I going to claim that we will lose because a lot depends on what happens between now and the GE. After March 2008, any politician with the right sense will not make claims after another... In politics there's no absolute surety. (But) we have to try our very best," added the Gerakan president.

The DAP won 19 state seats in the last polls, PKR won 9 and PAS won 1, while Umno won 11 seats. BN coalition partners Gerakan, MCA and MIC however were completely wiped out.

Koh is also facing heat as state BN chief, as there have been calls from within the coalition demanding that the mild-mannered politician step down. BN leaders have said this was necessary if the coalition is to have any chance of wresting back Penang from PR.

The Princeton graduate has been viewed as indecisive and a symbol of the BN leadership that was rejected by the voters in 2008.

BN chairman and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has spoken behind closed doors on the need to rejuvenate the Gerakan leadership with younger talent and acknowledges that BN component parties need new blood if inroads are to be made in Penang, where DAP's Lim is a formidable opponent.

Najib is due to pay a visit and speak at the Han Chiang High School in Penang on Sept 29 in what is seen as an attempt to woo the majority Chinese voters on the island. The school

field was the site of a massive PR rally on March 6, 2008, two days before Lim swept to power in the state.

The visit is seen as part of Najib's latest strategy to go to the ground every weekend before calling elections ahead of the BN mandate expiring in 2013.

Koh: In any coalition bound to be differences of voices, even within the same party there are at times different voices.

In its latest issue dated August 13, international weekly The Economist dubbed Penang "the first custom-made city of globalisation" and credited Lim for boosting the port city's revival by axing a racially-biased economic policy in the state to create a more level-playing field that appealed to foreign investors.

The international praise for Lim is seen as an indictment of Koh's rule of the island state, which began prospering under his mentor, the late Tun Lim Chong Eu, before the Princeton graduate took over as chief minister.

Despite all this, Koh insists that all is well with Penang BN — under his leadership.

"It is not true and unfair to say that Penang BN is fragmented. Over the last one year plus, Penang BN has been working very well together. Weekly meetings, activities together...small scale ceramahs going on. In any coalition bound to be differences of voices, even within the same party there are at times different voices.

"But the overall picture is that we have been very united, much more united than before March 2008," Koh said.

But he also admitted BN's chances of winning back Penang will be "extremely challenging."

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2011 The Malaysian Insider

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/penang-bn-to-focus-on-18-critical-seats-says-koh/>