

As polls loom, DAP bids to reverse eroding Malay support

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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 14 — A survey has shown that Penang DAP's support among Chinese and Indians remains at over 80 per cent but less than a third of Malays now back the party, down from nearly 50 per cent just a few months after Lim Guan Eng took office as chief minister.

The Malaysian Insider understands that the findings by opinion researchers Merdeka Center has raised such concern among the state leadership that it has scrambled to organise a leadership retreat tomorrow.

A source said today that Lim Guan Eng believes DAP can keep Penang based on non-Malay support. — file pic

A top party leader said that although the survey it commissioned showed a slight increase in non-Malay backing, the slide in Malay support shows that the multiracial party needs to "go for broke" in courting Malays.

"We must learn from 2008 that there can always be black swan moments," he said, referring to the unexpected gains made by opposition parties in the March 2008 election.

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) had denied Barisan Nasional (BN) its customary two-thirds majority in Parliament and won five state governments including Penang.

DAP made a clean sweep of all seats it contested in the island and obliterated Gerakan in the process.

But Umno has eroded Malay support for PR with repeated claims that the coalition is anti-Malay.

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

Despite this, the source said Lim, who is secretary general, believes that DAP can keep Penang based on non-Malay support.

But the party leader said that if the party has real intentions to form federal government, it cannot be on the defensive.

"The survey does not say these Malays now back BN. They are undecided and are there for the taking.

"Although in Penang we won 19 of the 40 state seats on our own, Malays make up 30 per cent of voters in some of these seats," he said.

DAP has tried to reach out to Malays by recruiting Malay leaders such as Transparency International Malaysia founder Tunku Abdul Aziz Tunku Ibrahim and Zairil Khir Johari.

Tunku Abdul Aziz is now vice chairman while Zairil, son of former Education Minister Tan Sri

Khair Johari, is Lim's political secretary.

But DAP leaders see the July 9 Bersih rally, where Malay icon and national laureate Ahmad Samad Said marched alongside tens of thousands to call for free and fair elections, as a watershed moment for the party in terms of becoming acceptable to Malays.

The Malaysian Insider understands that in a central leadership meeting soon after the march, party stalwart Lim Kit Siang said that liberal Malays now see DAP as acceptable after public anger over BN's clampdown on the rally.

"We are guided by that. The next six months may decide if we can become more than a Chinaman party," the party leader said.

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