

**Battling The Tough Political Terrain Of Penang**  
**Bernama**  
**March 4, 2012**  
**By Alan Ting**

KUALA LUMPUR, March 4 (Bernama) -- There is no doubt Penang will be the toughest terrain for Barisan Nasional (BN) to capture in the coming general election but not all is lost for the component parties as they are still putting in the effort to regain the Pearl of the Orient.

Many political analysts have written off the BN chances in Penang due to the non-Malay support to the current DAP-led state government but BN party workers are still very determined to put up a fight in the coming election.

"The battle is never easy, especially against the incumbent. Going against Lim Guan Eng also has never been easy," Penang Gerakan chief and state Barisan Nasional (BN) working committee chairman Datuk Dr Teng Hock Nam told Bernama in an interview recently.

Of the 40 state assembly seats in Penang, 27 are currently under the ruling opposition pact of DAP-PKR-PAS. In the last General Election, DAP won all the 19 state seats it contested, PKR won nine out of 16 while PAS won only one out of the five seats.

In the election, BN only won two of the 13 parliamentary seats and 11 of the 40 state seats in one of its worst performance ever.

Traditionally, Penang BN seat allocations are based on the formula of UMNO (15), Gerakan (13), MCA (10) and MIC (2).

However, Teng said Penang Gerakan has been preparing for the election since last year when they finalised "its candidates list" in January 2010 and appointed party's 17 constituency coordinators -- which included 13 for the state and four for the parliamentary seats.

"Most of these coordinators have been doing their groundwork for two years. They are the front liners as far as the choice of candidate is concerned, unless, there is strong reason not to put them (as the candidates)," said Teng.

He said since the appointment of the coordinators, the party has been moving with the grassroots including in the recent BR1M exercise where they have helped the deserving people to apply for the assistance.

"Besides that, we have made countless efforts to explain the policy issues and exposing the weaknesses of the state government.

"As far as Gerakan is concerned, we also went down to the coffee shops to collect feedback, sending flyers to residents in Penang and to counter wild allegations by Lim Guan Eng," he said.

Therefore, Dr Teng said the Penang BN will have a better chance to gain more seats in the coming election.

Penang MIC Chief Datuk PK Subbaiyah also said the party has been making preparations for the general election, including identifying the potential candidates for the two seats -- Prai and Bagan Dalam state constituencies, but would not reveal their names as it was the BN leadership that would make the final decision.

DAP wrested the two seats from MIC in the last election with Prai, currently held by Deputy Chief Minister II P Ramasamy while Bagan Dalam is held by A. Thanasekaran, also from DAP. Ramasamy beat state MIC deputy Chief L. Krishnan by 5,176 votes while Thanasekaran beat Subbaiyah by 3,053 votes.

Apart from that, UMNO Penang secretary Datuk Seri Hilmi Yahaya also said BN Penang has intensified its meet-the-people programmes as part of its strategies to reach out and win the hearts of the people.

These included community activities such as the walkabouts apart from intensified efforts to organise briefings for target groups to counter the issues and points raised by their opponent.

"We also distribute brochures and organise talks, while making optimum use of the blogs and short messaging service to reach a bigger audience," he told Bernama.

Penang wanita MCA chief Tan Cheng Liang said despite difficulties and constraints they face, most of the MCA leaders, including those defeated in the election, continued to maintain their service centres to provide services to the people.

"Like my service centre... (it is) open six days a week and all staffed by volunteers, providing the service from afternoon until night. All through our own pocket as we did not have any allocation to even hire a permanent Staff," she told Bernama.

"We still serve because we have been servicing them all these while. Therefore, we hope at least they would consider this when the election comes. I know it is difficult to win many seats but at least they should continue to have an MCA opposition in the state assembly. Currently, there is none as the ruling DAP conquered all," she added.

She explained, since the last two years, people have been raising many issues through the MCA service centres but they could help only to a certain extent as some matters are under the state government's jurisdiction.

"We try to help as much as we could but not all of them can be solved as it required other authorities," she said.

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Source: <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v6/newsindex.php?id=649780>