

PM Renews Effort To Reach Out To Penangites Ahead Of Election

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By Alan Ting

KUALA LUMPUR, April 20 (Bernama) -- Come Sunday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak will swing by Penang, as part of a renewed effort to reach out to various communities in the state.

First on the list is a meeting with members of Penang's 5,000-strong Barisan Nasional (BN) election machinery at the Bukit Jawi Golf Club in Nibong Tebal where he is expected to deliver an important message.

In the afternoon, he will hold separate closed-door dialogues with Chinese and Indian non-governmental organisations (NGO) organised by Kelab Penyokong 1Malaysia (KP1M).

"About 3,000 people from various Chinese bodies are expected to attend. This dialogue will allow the prime minister to inform us about the latest developments on the government transformation plan. At the same time, the community can also directly voice its views," said organising chairman Lim Boo Chang.

He said, most of the Chinese NGOs wanted the federal government to come in to help Penang, especially on socio-economic issues such as addressing traffic woes, which they felt was beyond the capability of the state government.

"There is definitely a role for the federal government to play. Most of the time, we only hear about economic statistics being played up by the state government, but in reality, the people don't feel it. Traffic jams are getting worse and the people don't feel the benefits from such investments to the state and the economy," said Lim.

Some prominent Chinese associations in Penang are helping KP1M to organise the event, such as the Penang Chinese Town Hall Association, Penang Wushu, Dragon and Lion Dance Association and Penang Straits Chinese Association.

Najib has made a number of visits to Penang over the past one year. Last September, he helped raise RM15 million for 15 Chinese schools when he cycled over seven kilometres with 5,000 schoolchildren and handed RM1 million each to 15 Chinese schools under the '1 Malaysia Charity Ride for Education'.

The BN chief also attended the BN Hari Raya open house in Permatang Pauh last year and Penang BN 2012 Chinese New Year Open House at Tanjong City Marina.

His visit can be described as "confidence rebuilding" or "rallying the troops" among the BN camp but political analyst Dr Sivamurugan Pandian said it might still be an uphill task for BN to recapture Penang.

His assumption is based on the fact that of the 11 seats won by BN in the 2008 general election, only five were with a majority of more than 1,000 votes.

"If you compare the 29 seats won by PKR-DAP-PAS, only one winning seat (Batu Uban-PKR) had a below 1,000-vote majority. It would be good if BN could retain all 11 seats it won in 2008 and work on recapturing Batu Uban and more," he noted.

Penang has a 40-seat legislative assembly. For BN to recapture the state, it needs to retain all the 11 seats that it won in 2008 and win another 10 more seats.

BN strategists believe that there is a chance for them to regain up to 15 seats in Penang, and a possibility to win more seats, as well.

Umno is confident of keeping the 11 seats it won in Penang in 2008 while Gerakan and the MIC are also confident of winning back some they had lost.

In 2008, Umno only lost three seats but Gerakan was defeated in all of the 13 seats it contested, MCA lost nine and MIC dropped two.

DAP leaders recently boasted that 90 per cent of Chinese and Indian voters in the state supported the Opposition based on a poll they had taken last year, and were thus, not overly worried.

Dr Sivamurugan said, BN should come up with its own shadow exco line-up in Penang to recapture the state, noting there was talk of a new state BN chairman.

On their part, some BN leaders expect an announcement on the state BN leadership, come Sunday.

Currently, BN is focusing on various issues, particularly the sale of land in Bayan Mutiara to property developers, to expose discrepancies in the land deal, and the car park fiasco in Air Itam.

Although chances for BN to recapture Penang may appear remote for now, Najib hopes to "keep the conversation going" with Penangites and make his presence felt in the state.

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