

**BN sure of 22 Penang seats, offering more election goodies**  
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**By Jahabar Sadiq**

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 7 — Barisan Nasional (BN) is confident of retaking Penang by snaring at least 22 out of the 40 state seats and believes that five more are within reach, with the ruling federal coalition planning to offer more goodies ahead of the next general election, say sources.

They told The Malaysian Insider that ground reports show the change of fortunes is due to Gerakan secretary-general Teng Chang Yeow leadership of Penang BN as well as media attacks against Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng over indiscriminate hill slope development as well as weaknesses in Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) main component party, PKR.

"BN is confident of 22 state seats and can win another five with some effort as Teng has united the component parties to work together," a source told The Malaysian Insider, noting the winnable seats are currently held by PKR and PAS.

Umno now holds 11 state seats to PR's 29 — which consists of the DAP's 19, PKR's nine and PAS with one seat in the 40-seat state assembly. Penang fell to the hands of the loose opposition pact of the DAP, PKR and PAS in Election 2008 when Gerakan, the party that had helmed the state for nearly 40 years since 1969, was completely wiped out without securing a seat.

"Umno can take all seats that are now held by PKR and PAS. It will be up to Gerakan, MCA and MIC to win the rest from DAP," the source said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has yet to call a general election while Lim has insisted that he does not need to follow BN's move to call for a simultaneous state election. Both their mandates expire by April 2013. In the coming polls, Umno will contest in 15 state seats, Gerakan in 13, the MCA in 10 and MIC in two.

Another source said that the BN leadership is pleased that Lim is preoccupied with state matters and staving off attacks from BN and its media over land issues, making the popular DAP secretary-general unable to travel around the country to campaign for PR. He recently missed a DAP trip to Sabah, where he normally draws thousands to his ceramahs.

"The media is not helping Lim. He needs to stay back and explain the issues raised by the media, about hill slope development, housing land for the poor and traffic congestion," the source said.

Umno-linked Media Prima Bhd's TV3 and New Straits Times together with the MCA's The Star have been at the forefront of knocking Lim's image in Penang, which has experienced major property development and business growth since he took over the government in March 2008.

Penang BN has proposed several initiatives to retake the state, even suggesting returning the free-port status taken from the island-state in the 1970s. The state BN has also questioned the privatisation of the Penang Port to logistics tycoon Tan Sri Syed Mokhtar Al-Bukhary, whose Seaport Terminal Sdn Bhd received the nod for the takeover recently.

Sources say BN is planning more goodies for Penang, the country's top electronics manufacturing zone with factories located on the island and the mainland that is connected by one bridge with another due for completion next year.

"BN is thinking of toll concessions for those using motorcycles, possibly making it free for them to use the bridge. More will be revealed once the election campaign starts," a source told The Malaysian Insider.

In a recent interview with The Malaysian Insider, Teng credited Najib for bringing a total revamp of the BN that was making voters rethink their anti-BN stand.

"Looking at Najib's programmes, it shows that this is a sincere prime minister who is trying to help every layer of society. People know that he is trying his level best to move the country's economy forward," he said.

"So this is how we will fight this war — it is about what we (BN) have to offer, rather than insulting PR. We will fight policy to policy, ideals to ideals. After all, if we engage in name-calling, the retaliation will never stop," Teng added in the interview.

Najib has expressed confidence of winning back all states now ruled by PR and also regaining the two-thirds parliamentary majority in the next election. Apart from Penang, the other states are Kelantan, Kedah and Selangor.

BN has already kicked off the election push with Najib headlining the Jelajah Janji Ditepati (Promises Fulfilled Tour) while a media blitz called "I Choose Malaysia" featuring state companies' chief executives and pro-government bloggers is also said to be linked to the ruling coalition's campaign.

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