

Guan Eng raises spectre of forest clearing under BN
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Penang chief minister warns if BN regains state, forest reserves will be depleted and financial benefits for citizens will be affected.

PETALING JAYA: Lim Guan Eng claims that Penang risks having its forest reserves encroached upon if the Barisan Nasional (BN) wrests control of the state in the next general election.

In a lead-up to the election widely speculated to be called in the next few months, the Penang chief minister pointed to statistics from the forestry department that showed protected forests in states under BN and PAS as having had vast tracts cleared illegally between 2006 and 2015.

The DAP secretary-general said Penang was the only state where permanent forest reserves had not seen any such cutting of trees and vegetation during the same period.

“Only Penang did not touch a single square inch of forest reserve,” he said, claiming that illegal clearings of private land without permit were acted against and stopped.

“If BN were to succeed in taking back power in Penang, it is clear that they would reduce our forest reserves, as they have done in other states over the last 10 years.

“Clearly it is BN that is making our hills and forests ‘botak’ (bald) as are their new ally, PAS, in Kelantan,” Lim said in a statement.

He said the forestry department data showed that Pahang had seen 161,379 hectares of permanent forest reserve cleared – the largest in any state over the period.

“The forestry department data also showed that 74,032 hectares of forest reserve was cleared in Perak, while Kelantan under PAS had 57,919 hectares cleared.”

Lim, who is the state assemblyman for Air Putih, said besides the hills and forests, a BN government would also damage Penang’s financial condition.

“Our finances may also be ‘botak’ and we may not be able to enjoy the strong financial performance and annual budget surpluses over the eight years from 2008 to 2015,” he said.

He said the state government was confident that voters would choose a “people-centric government” over a “crony government” interested in abuse of power and financial mismanagement.

Lim said Penang under the DAP-led Pakatan Rakyat (replaced by Pakatan Harapan from Sept 2015 onwards) recorded accumulated budget surpluses totalling RM574 million during the period.

The amount was also more than the RM373 million of budget surpluses recorded under BN's rule from 1957 to 2007, he added.

"Pakatan performed better in only eight years than BN did in 50 years," he said.

The Bagan MP said the surpluses enabled the state to give out more than RM412 million in yearly cash contributions to 1.6 million Penangites, including senior citizens, the disabled, single mothers, new born babies, university students, trishaw pullers, taxi-drivers and school-bus drivers.

Also, every registered hard-core poor household had its basic income topped up to RM790 every month, he added.

Lim also said that starting this year all property owners are given a 6% discount in assessment rate payment, while owners of low-cost, low-medium cost and kampung houses are given full exemption.

"BN reclaiming back Penang will mean all these monetary contributions will dry up," he said.

He claimed that yearly allocation to vernacular and religious schools would also end under BN.

"Do we want a return to the bad old days of BN when vernacular schools did not receive a fixed or even some allocation yearly?"

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