

Speech by DAP Secretary General Lim Guan Eng at the DAP National Special Congress on 12 November 2017 at the IDCC Shah Alam, Selangor

A Democratic, Progressive and Prosperous Malaysia for the many

Preamble

We, the DAP national delegates, gather here today for our National Special Congress as requested by the Registrar of Societies (ROS) to hold a fresh election for the Central Executive Committee members, once again. We had earlier decided to accept the instructions by the ROS, under protest.

Since the last National Conference on 4th December 2016, we lost two of DAP's most important national leaders, the former Secretary-General and my university mate Sdr. Kerk Kim Hock and the former Perak Chairman and one of the earliest DAP members Sdr. Lau Dak Kee. Both of them were detained under the Internal Security Act during the Ops Lalang in 1987. Let us pay tribute to Sdr Kerk and Lau for their contributions to the Party and to Malaysia, especially during difficult dark years.

1. Crisis and leadership

Before I proceed into the details of this special meeting, let us together express DAP's solidarity with the people of Penang for the recent unprecedented natural disaster of worst flood and storm in history that befell upon us on 4th and 5th November. No words can fully grasp the unexpected calamity.

On behalf of DAP, let me express my sincerest gratitude to Penangites and Malaysians that have helped our people during the tumultuous time, and those who continue to assist us till this very moment. Your precious assistance, contributions and donations will forever be appreciated. Many volunteers come to help us in Penang from all over the country and many of you are here today with us.

As of 8a.m. on Sunday 12th November, DAP Penang's account has received a sum of RM7,554,058.16 million of public donation and still counting. DAP Penang Chairman Chow Kon Yeow and I are overwhelmed by the public expression of solidarity with the people of Penang. The amount raised would eventually be channelled to the Penang State Government and I promise you we will spend every single cent from the donation to return the lives of the victims to normalcy.

I appreciate the Federal Government for its quick response to my plea of assistance on that fateful early hour of 5th November. I thank Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, as well as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Selangor and Perak Mentris Besar Datuk Seri Azmin Ali and Datuk Seri Zambry Abdul Kadir, Ministers Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim and Datuk Seri Noh Omar for

their help. I would also like to thank the Fire Services Department, the Armed Forces, the police, RELA, and many other state and federal agencies, as well as non-governmental organisations, that have selflessly gave their everything to help us.

The Penang disaster also saw the coming together of Malaysians transcending race, region or politics. We now know people like the bilal, Sapno Tukijo, who opened up a surau to 70 non-Muslim flood victims at Taman Free School; the Kew Ong Yeah temple along Jalan Megat Harun in Bukit Mertajam which took in five Malay families; and many Muslim and non-Muslim NGOs who extended their helping hands to all victims, regardless of race, religion or politics.

The Malays have a saying “berat mata memandang berat lagi bahu memikul”; basically, no matter how bad you see a calamity, it is even harder for those who have to suffer it. I empathise with every single person and family who has to go through this hardship, especially those who are still at the relief centres. There is so much to do in the aftermath of the disaster. I know how difficult it is and we are doing our utmost to help. Please accept my apology for any inconvenience caused during our effort to bring your life back to normal.

It is in such massive crisis that our leadership is tested and proven. We don't hide, we don't run and we will not disappear. We are there with the people as the disaster unfolded and lead the people through. No one could prevent a disaster of such scale. With climate change, no one can rule out what's next.

In a week since the disaster struck, the Penang Pakatan Harapan Government went through four immediate phases to face the challenges:

First, during the rescue phase, we recognised the magnitude of the crisis from the start, which was why I called Datuk Seri Zahid at 330a.m. on Sunday 5th November for help. Probably because of the distress call, by the time the nation woke up in the morning, everyone knew that it is an extraordinary crisis that we have to put everything else aside, including political differences, to come to the rescue of the people.

Second, cleaning and clearing will be a major logistical challenge for the state, and it has just started for some areas as water has finally receded in some parts of the mainland just yesterday. It is a heart wrecking experience to see families being forced to throw away furniture, precious family photos, and other cherished items that evoke pleasant and wonderful memories.

Third, we have a real plan. Five days into the disaster, I presented a Chief Ministerial statement in the Penang State Assembly to outline our RM 100-million rebuilding plan “Pulau Pinang Bangkit” or “Penang Bounces Back”. The overall plan has three components: a) Government's assistance and other efforts; b) Volunteerism of the

public in the form of “Penang Bangkit Volunteers’ Days”, and c) Private sector collaboration such as bringing rival ride-sharing companies Grab and Uber to work together for Penang.

Fourth, building resilience against climate change will be high on our agenda. While there are still some who deny climate change, the increasingly frequent occurrence of calamities that happened to cities around the world means we can’t hide from the reality of climate change. As I announced in the state budget on 2nd November, prior to the disaster, the Penang State Government is committed to building resilience against climate change. As a party of ideas and ideals, DAP will be the first party in Malaysia to outline a coherent policy response to climate change.

Again, I urge all Malaysians to stand together with the people of Penang so that we overcome the challenges and bounce back strongly.

2. The ROS and the Special Congress

We are here today for one reason, and one reason only – because the ROS had forced our hand to hold our fresh election for the CEC. As the law abiding party, we had fought our case legally but, after months of deliberations, we had come to the conclusion that we would comply with the ROS’s demands, no matter how strange, ridiculous and unbecoming some of its requests so that the DAP is not deregistered.

Therefore, we have agreed to hold this fresh CEC election, with the same list as the party election of 15 December 2012. We also agreed to appoint an independent auditor to handle the fresh election. Yet many members cannot even attend today’s Special Congress as ROS restricted it to only delegates. No democracy, no participation, just like watching a football match being played in an empty stadium.

No other political parties in Malaysia had to elect its leadership thrice (2012, 2013 and 2017) using the same delegate list. As if we are in some science fiction with the clock turned back – I’m quite sure some of you may remember a movie called Back to the Future – and we now are going to elect the CEC of 2012 term in 2017 when the party’s term is only for three years.

At the election on 15 December 2012, there was a minor spreadsheet error but our opponents decided to blow things out of proportion. On 18th April 2013, two days before the nomination day of the 2013 General Election, the DAP was threatened with the possibility of not being able to use the Rocket symbol. With the help of our allies in Pakatan Rakyat then, we weathered the storm.

On 30th July 2013, ROS directed the DAP to hold a re-election for its CEC without providing any reasons to the earlier DAP’s explanations and responses over the queries made by the ROS on the 2012 Congress. Being a law abiding party, the DAP

complied with the ROS's directive and held a Special Congress on 29 September 2013 to re-elect the CEC. An independent auditor was engaged to monitor the entire election exercise based on the list for 2012.

We have to wait for almost two months before the ROS replied us on 11th November 2013 that the newly-elected CEC was "suspended" until the ROS is duly satisfied. Realising the ridiculous situation the ROS had put on the DAP, the party filed for a judicial review on 22nd January 2014 against the ROS letter.

On 23rd September 2014, the ROS agreed to settle the judicial review by agreeing that it had no powers to "suspend" the CEC. With the settlement, we withdrew our application. Well, it seemed like all's well that ends well.

But from the point of the ROS, it was meant to be a sword over our head. Out of the blue, almost 4 years later, the ROS issued a media statement on 7th July 2017 instructing the DAP to hold another re-election for its CEC.

The ROS said, and I quote, "the DAP re-election (in 2013) should have been based on the 15 December 2012 list of 2,576 qualified delegates". Once again we are in a quandary because we had followed every instruction and directive from the ROS since December 2012. We did use the 2012 qualified delegates list for the 2013 re-election per the directive by the ROS. This was even vetted by the independent auditors.

The DAP cooperated fully with the ROS by providing every document. We gave the ROS letters, qualified delegates and branches lists on a timely basis. The last request for documents by the ROS was in November 2014.

Yet, until today, the ROS never told us if we did anything wrong. We were never told what we did, or might have done wrong in our compliance with the 2013 re-election directive. Even when the question is repeatedly raised in Parliament, the answers from the Home Minister were always "the ROS is still investigating".

DAP will not be snuffed out. That is why we decided to swallow this injustice to hold this Special Congress even though there is no basis whatsoever. The DAP is being framed up by a politically motivated ROS to fix up the party. We are punished for being honest and truthful. But to ensure that the party is not snuffed out, we have no choice as the risk of deregistration is too great.

Today I hope everything should be resolved, once and for all. As I said many times, we are a law abiding party but at the same we wish that no one should try to test our patience. We also urge our opponents to play fair and to be professional.

3. GE 14 – We are in no ordinary time!

Nevertheless, it is almost impossible to expect our opponents to be fair and professional as the 14th General Election looms. The Prime Minister has called GE14 “the mother of all elections”. In other words, Malaysians will have to brace for the dirtiest election ever. In the last election, the then Pakatan Rakyat garnered 51% of the popular votes but failed to win power due to the way seats were systematically and unfairly gerrymandered by the Election Commission.

During GE13, BN had yet to be burdened by the 1MDB scandal, GST and other bad news; he was extraordinarily cash-rich during the campaign; and was already fully backed by all government-owned or linked media as well as agencies campaigning for BN. Yet BN won with only 47% of popular votes, and actually won 60 out of its 133 seats with a slim margin. In effect, BN lost the battle of the Prime Ministerial candidates between their Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Pakatan leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim

The scenario for the coming 14th General Elections is different. Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim is again in jail and unable to contest the next general elections, PAS now reduced to a de facto ally of UMNO and BN; and BN’s going into overdrive to play the religious and racial card to win over the majority Malay votes at all cost.

BN’s aim is to make the Opposition seen as a DAP-led coalition with only Chinese support and dangerous for the Malays to ever consider voting. Sdr. Lim Kit Siang is portrayed as the most vilified politician in Malaysian history just to make the DAP looks “toxic” to the Malay voters; and any Malay-majority parties align with DAP are equally “toxic” to vote for.

However no one expected another split in UMNO to result in the reconciliation of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad with Sdr Anwar. This eventually led to the realignment of Pakatan Harapan on 14th July 2017 that altered the political terrain altogether.

If BN wins, the 1MDB scandal will remain a festering wound to Malaysians and hurt us with losses of tens of billions of Ringgit in future. If BN wins, GST will remain and likely to go up as in current practice worldwide trend. If BN wins, our real incomes will stagnate and cost of living will only go higher.

If BN wins, there will be no national unity with Malaysians put into racial boxes where the Malays are seen as not good enough, Chinese as greedy and not trustworthy and Indians blamed for gangsterism whereas Sabah and Sarawak are treated like British colonies instead of equal partners in the Malaysian Federation, If BN wins, the Opposition will probably be wiped out and Malaysia will be under kleptocratic rule for many more years. Is that what you want your children’s future to be?

4. Bangsa Malaysia – renewing Malaysian Dream for the next generation

Let's be clear about this: because Najib and UMNO could lose GE14 and they are very weak on the governance and economic front, the emotive race and religion cards will be their only weapons. And the DAP will continue to be the whipping boy in Najib's scheme to scare the Malay voters from voting for Pakatan Harapan.

The battle is between fear and hope!

Pakatan Harapan has to offer all Malaysians hope and a new sense of solidarity and nationhood while UMNO and BN do everything to divide us. We need to reassure everyone, Malays and non-Malays, that we are not a threat to anyone, and we can build this nation we cherish together.

Sometimes, it is funny to see that they had created so many lies that they can't even remember to stick to their own script. Sometimes their lies contradict badly that they exposed themselves as two-faced liars.

For example, at the MCA AGM in Kuala Lumpur last week on 5th November, Najib said the DAP could not form the federal government even if we win big in this coming GE14. That is meant to convince Chinese voters that voting for MCA is a better choice as BN would continue to rule forever, which is actually not the case.

Yet in Kuala Ketil, Kedah on 17th January 2017, Najib told the Malay crowd that the DAP would control Pakatan Harapan if it wins the coming GE. He claimed that even if Bersatu, PKR and Amanah have a majority of combined seats, the DAP would control the new Pakatan Harapan government.

Why did he say that? Because he is trying to scare the Malays into believing that the DAP is a "Chinese party" that would control a Malay-majority government, and therefore would not work for the benefit of the Malays.

The DAP is a multiracial party from the day of its inception in 1966. We were never meant to be and will never be a race-based party. The DAP will pursue the Malaysian Dream, as it is the shared dream of many. While we adjust our strategies and tactics throughout our 50 years of existence, we have never wavered from our principles.

We are with Pakatan Harapan today because we know that political reality does not allow any single party to rule Malaysia. This is good for all because this enable us to work together.

It is a given that our opponents will divide the nation on racial and religious lines to win the next election. It is Pakatan Harapan's historic role to build a nation – Bangsa Malaysia – on empathy, mutual respect and trust to battle the hatred, divisiveness and mistrust planted by UMNO and BN.

Pakatan Harapan and DAP also want to offer Sabah and Sarawak a New Deal to renegotiate the Malaysian federalism and to devolve more powers and responsibilities to Sabah and Sarawak to decide on how to improve the lives of ordinary Sabahans and Sarawakians.

This is not just about winning the 14th General Elections. GE14 will decide whether our country has a manifest destiny of greatness or only providing greatness for BN at the expense of Malaysians. Our mission in GE14 is to nothing less than to build a better nation for the next generation.

5. Economic ideas for the many

The economy is an area Barisan Nasional is vulnerable. But it is also an area that Pakatan Harapan needs a clear vision for the future to convince and reassure ordinary Malaysians that a change is for the better. It's time for a democratic, progressive and prosperous Malaysia for the many. We have the economic ideas and practical experience from running good governments in Penang and Selangor to make this a reality.

BN is vulnerable because:

First, the many financial scandals including 1MDB, Felda and MARA, as well as corruption at all levels that hurt the quality of lives of ordinary Malaysians. These scandals – 1MDB, Felda and MARA – have destroyed the trust and loyalty of ordinary Malaysians towards Najib and Barisan Nasional.

To many loyal BN supporters, the BN now is different from the BN of old. Many loyal BN supporters are shocked not only by the scale of corruption but also massive arbitrary abuse of power. Even being mentioned in an affidavit in a court case in the UK involving an alleged payment of RM 90 million to a political party, former BERSIH chair Dato Ambiga Sreenevasan can be subjected to a police investigation. But death threats against me as Penang Chief Minister go unpunished.

If you think things were bad then, now it is much worse! BN supporters are willing to switch their votes but the question now is whether Pakatan Harapan can fill the leadership void and be trusted to steer the economy better for ordinary Malaysians.

Second, BN's financial excesses are burdening Malaysians. Often it is the ordinary people that bear the brunt of autocratic leaders' misrule. Witness the implementation of GST, which was never necessary before. Malaysia was a rich country that can afford to feed its people, build schools and public infrastructure, even built Putrajaya without imposing the GST.

To ordinary Malaysians, the BN now as compared to before is remembered for:

- a) Imposition of GST on 1st April 2015;
- b) Massive depreciation of ringgit by 30% since October 2014;
- c) Government austerity on welfare, higher education, schools and hospitals since 2015 which resulted in hardship for ordinary Malaysians;
- d) A very aggressive tax collection attempt bordering on “tax extortion” in order to secure the much needed revenue by preying on legitimate businesses whilst letting off BN crony like Jho Low; and
- e) Huge debts incurred through various mega projects as well as 1MDB which will burden the generations to come.

There is a hidden crisis but clear and present for all to see except by BN which refuses to acknowledge at all.

Third, Najib has no growth strategy for the next generation. Even the GLCs and GLICs are now voting with their feet to invest heavily overseas as they complained that the returns on investments in Malaysia are too low. This is after the GLCs being given all the benefits, incentives, preferences and special favours in the Malaysian market and often crowding out domestic private capitals.

Many more Malaysians are forced to work overseas to find a decent living under Najib’s rule. And many more unskilled foreign workers, documented or undocumented, are being imported under Najib’s rule, often threatening the job prospects of ordinary Malaysians and resulting in stagnated wages across the Malaysian economy.

For Malaysia to grow, we need to put our people at the centre. The economy is to serve the needs and aspirations of ordinary Malaysians, not to serve the interests of GLCs, rich cronies or foreign speculators.

Malaysia needs an economy that creates decent jobs for Malaysians that are of high productivity, high skills and high income. We need a government that promotes innovation, education and technological upgrade, and not concessions and benefits to crony businesses. We need an economic governing structure that rewards hard work and not one that rewards connections.

We have done that in Selangor and Penang and we can do the same in Malaysia. We need a change that even BN supporters clamour for. We need an economy for the many, not the few!

6. People’s power

DAP is now being portrayed as UMNO's major enemy because DAP is a principled party that is tried and tested as well as fully supported by the public.

Until 10th November 2007, there was no sign that BN would face any trouble in the following election in 2008. BN won 91% of seats and 64% of popular votes in the Abdullah Badawi wave in the 2004 general election. But everything changed this week a decade ago.

After more than two years of campaign against the Election Commission, the Opposition parties and NGOs jointly organized the first BERSIH rally which attracted tens of thousands of participants. Two weeks later, HINDRAF mobilised tens of thousands on the streets on 25th November 2007. These were watershed moments that shaped the 2008 election and continues to shape Malaysian politics.

For those who think that there is no hope in GE14, or for Najib's overconfident strategists who opine that the Prime Minister is "unsinkable", we should be reminded that even by February 2008 or even during the campaign period, very few thought a change of government in five states were possible.

Fellow Malaysians and fellow DAP comrades, we are now just months away from GE14. Victory is possible!

If it is just DAP or our allies in Pakatan Harapan, we would not be able to fight the Najib electoral juggernaut premised on using cash, paddling lies and fake news, and campaigning through government machineries and resources.

But as the elections in the past decade shown, when it is the people versus Barisan Nasional, we know that BN could and would fall.

We in the DAP must be on the side of the people, on the side of the many, not the few, and on the right side of history. I would like to remind myself and all of you here today of what I have said 5 years ago at our National Congress of 2012: "I want all of us to remember this: that it is not the number of members, not the might of raw power nor money that count in politics. Those may be the essential elements Barisan Nasional politics. But in DAP politics, it is our principles, our ideas, and our ideals that count. Remember – it is our moral compass that defines and distinguishes DAP from Barisan Nasional parties."

In face with the "mother of all elections", DAP will renew the leadership today and together we will single-mindedly focus on winning not just the next general election but to win for the next generation. So that Malaysia is a nation united with a functioning democracy; enjoys equal opportunities; freedom from fear and poverty; respects the dignity and fundamental rights of every citizen as enshrined in the Federal Constitution; rewards those who work hard and promotes a culture of

excellence; as well as ensures peace, law and order as an undeniable right and not a privilege.

Our DAP Special Congress is held under a rigid agenda set by the ROS only to hold party re-elections of our top leadership. No one else except party delegates can attend or speak. But we also want to remind everyone of our vision of building a Malaysia for the many that we can be proud of.

Malaysians are sick and tired of being identified with 1MDB scandal, a kleptocratic state or being the most corrupt nation on earth? Together we want to make Malaysia right again for our children. A democratic, progressive and prosperous Malaysia for the many!

Bangkit, bangkit! Bangkit Rakyat! Ubah, Ubah! Ubah Malaysia!

Lim Guan Eng