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Re-appointment of Koh as Chief Minister ends speculation over the post

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THE timely announcement that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has sanctioned the appointment of Penang Gerakan chairman Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon as the Chief Minister comes as a great relief to the party.

It will also remove the tension felt by Penang residents over the past three days.

They have been waiting impatiently for an outcome following rumours that the MCA may take over the post which Gerakan has held for the past three decades.

This turn of events took place after the sudden resignation of Bayan Lepas State Assemblyman Lim Chien Aun and Datuk Keramat State Assemblyman Lim Boo Chang from the State Gerakan on Thursday, and their subsequent intention to cross over to the MCA.

The Lim duo were followed by national vice-president Dr Goh Cheng Teik, who said that as a matter of principle, he would also resign and throw his support behind them.

Their resignations, and the gathering of the entire Penang MCA leadership in Langkawi with party president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, further fuelled speculation about the Penang MCA's intention of wanting to wrest the State, which has often been dubbed Gerakan's "Jewel in the Crown".

Alas, for the MCA, it was not to be.

For, all rumours were put to rest yesterday when Koh was re-appointed to the Chief Minister's post which he has held since 1990.

But can the Penang MCA be faulted for its enthusiasm this week over the possibility of taking over the Chief Ministership of Penang?

Perhaps, the party felt it had the edge over Gerakan with nine seats to eight in the State Legislative Assembly. Gerakan won 10 seats in the just-concluded general election but its numbers were reduced following the resignation of the two Lims.

It looks as if Koh will have the last laugh over this. Or will he?

Although there were threats of imminent mass resignations by members within Gerakan, Koh and Gerakan's national and State leadership managed to garner enough support from members to stand by him.

The issue that should be studied carefully, however, is the intention of the two Lims who had "abandoned" the party, barely a week after the polls.

Penang voters may feel betrayed by their decision as the two now appear insincere in their campaign pledges to serve the people.

A Penang voter in a letter faxed to Lim Chien Aun today (copy of which was faxed to the New Straits Times) had this to say:

"I drove back from Malacca with my wife on polling day just to vote. We voted for you, Lim Chien Aun, because you represented Gerakan under the leadership of Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon and because we believe in Dr Koh not only as a most capable leader but one of the few 'clean' politicians around.

"As a voter, I feel cheated and sad that the son of Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu, a man I also much respect, can turn around and 'bite the hand that fed him (through votes)' after being helped to win."

If one is to indulge in finger-pointing over who started this hiccup within Gerakan, the two Lims are the obvious figures.

In their resignation letters faxed to party president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik on Thursday, they cited unsatisfactory progress in development

and the poor quality of leadership as reasons for leaving the party.

Dr Lim, in response, said:

"If Penang is really lagging in development, why did they seek re-election? They should have resigned earlier and joined the DAP."

This statement bears some logic, considering that Chien Aun, the son of Koh's predecessor, Chong Eu, should know better than to fault the State Government's level of development.

Chong Eu's contributions to Penang's economic success have never gone unacknowledged by the current State and national leaders, who, time and again, have credited him for jump-starting Penang's industrialisation in the early 1970s and made it the "Silicon Island" as it is known today.

"We have received regular feedback from members, comprising of local and multinational manufacturers, that they are happy with the business-friendly Government led by Dr Lim and Dr Koh over the past three decades," Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (north) chairman Datuk O. K. Lee said.

The stability under both men, Lee added, had enabled MNCs to expand their operations in Penang, especially during the past decade.

"As a result, the people of Penang have been able to enjoy continuous economic growth, progress and prosperity in the past 30 years.

"This same rapid economic development helped Penang so much that as a State, we suffered the least during the recent economic crisis."

The question to be asked is: where do the two Lims hope to go from here?

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