

25/09/2000

Dr M's faith in Gerakan's ability to lead Penang a timely boost

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's confidence in Gerakan's ability to lead Penang is indeed an endorsement of great significance.

Gerakan's hold on power in Penang, a proud achievement by any party's standard other than Umno, is now entrenched.

The continuous power play in the State, following the MCA's overture that it wants a larger role in the State Government, is perhaps resolved, at least for now.

Besides the morale booster for Gerakan, the message to other Barisan Nasional component parties, the MCA in particular, is this - the numbers game does not apply in deciding which party gets to rule.

Instead, it depends on the party's leadership track record, especially in subscribing to the co-operative and kindred spirit espoused by the BN.

More crucial is that the bickering, back-stabbing and the undermining of each other's interest that has overshadowed Gerakan-MCA political relations cannot continue.

It was not just Dr Mahathir's endorsement of Gerakan, it was the words he used:

"Based on the loyalty and spirit of friendship among the BN component parties, Gerakan will continue to be given the trust to lead the State."

Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik was quick in thanking the Prime Minister for the confidence in Gerakan.

And based on Dr Mahathir's assurance, Dr Lim could take stock of his own position in the party and that in the Cabinet.

The long-serving Gerakan supremo, with Dr Mahathir's guarantee in the bag, can now afford to let go his ministerial position with the knowledge that it would not affect Gerakan's standing, either at the Federal level or in Penang especially.

But Gerakan also needs to be mindful that the trust placed in it is one which would be scrutinised by its detractors, the MCA in particular.

Efforts to undermine Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon's administration since the 1999 general election have been on-going, subtlety or otherwise.

Before Gerakan gets carried away with the Prime Minister's endorsement, the party should not think that all is well with them in Penang.

Said a political observer: "There is much to be done to convince the electorate that their votes in helping Gerakan to power was not a mistake."

Gerakan, therefore, needs to remain vigilant and ensure that its electoral pledges for a better quality of life are met.

Failure to do so would not only give the Opposition and Gerakan's adversaries ammunition in discrediting the party, but would also loosen its grip of its crown jewel - the chief ministership of Penang.

And this fact has not gone unnoticed by Koh, Penang's second-term Chief Minister and Gerakan vice-president, who views Dr Mahathir's reassurance as an "inspiration" to redouble party efforts.

Which means they must abandon the confrontational approach and assume a positive stance by working hard and reviewing their service to the people.

After all, it was party deputy president Datuk Kerk Choo Ting's advice to members that they tune themselves to the changes if they wish to take the party to greater heights.

Gerakan members, as it is, have been constantly reminded of the need to

prepare themselves for the future, especially in adapting to the New Economy.

In facing to meet the demands of knowledge economy, Gerakan was reminded to have its feet planted firmly on the ground and to guard against members' complacency and against those who make unreasonable demands.

A trend, Dr Lim might have detected, and one which he most likely would tackle by urging members to be realistic.

It is true that the Prime Minister's confidence can lull someone, especially in politics. Hence, the party president's advice to members is not to rest on their laurels but to continue to work hard to serve the people.

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