

# PPP back in mainstream politics

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**PETALING JAYA, Wed:** Once a force to be reckoned with, the People's Progressive Party has been struggling to live up to its past reputation.

Five to six years after it joined the Barisan Nasional in 1972, internal leadership struggles pushed it to the sidelines of national politics.

The crisis continued into the early 90s, to a point where several factions laid claim to the party's presidency.

The situation did not improve even after party president Datuk M. Kayveas took over when S.I. Rajah retired from active politics.

At one point, certain quarters went to court to stop the annual general assembly, claiming to have made secret arrangements with Rajah to take over the president's post.

However in recent years, the multiracial party has clawed its way back into the mainstream of political respectability.

Kayveas said: "It is true that to many people, we were once a bunch of iokers, a party with no credibility and direction, and all this was the result of the internal feud for power.

"By 1988, although still a BN component party, we were no longer invited to sit in BN meetings and when I took over in 1993, I vowed to change the situation."

He did his best to alter the image of the party to ensure it developed into a fully multiracial political movement which appealed to urban and rural citizens who viewed themselves as Malaysians, regardless of race or religion.

Formed in 1953 by the Seenivasagam brothers, the PPP was initially a state-based opposition party registered as the Perak Progressive Party.

It went on to contest on its own, the 1955 Legislative Council elections before Merdeka, after it withdrew from the Alliance (then Parti Perikatan, now BN) due to the non-allocation of seats.

PPP was later renamed the People's Progressive Party, to reflect its national sentiments and multiracial approach.

However, the party's recent emergence as a viable political entity has been evident only in the past five years or so when its membership base nationwide experienced a steady growth (its membership stands at 320,000).

The party endured a long wait and disappointment before being acknowledged as an "equal" member of the BN.

The last time the PPP held an elected post was in 1986, for an assembly seat in Perak. From 1990, it had not been allocated any seat owing to internal disputes.

Despite the setback, the party remained loyal to the BN coalition led by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

There was much soul searching as to its role and significance.

The matter was repeatedly stressed on at all events and in press releases, and the party president was under tremendous pressure to ensure party members did not desert the party to join the Opposition.

Despite the pressure and lack of recognition, Kayveas continued to advise members to be patient, saying that "the prime minister is a wise person and would make an announcement when the time was right".

The wait finally paid off on Dec 6 last year when Kayveas was sworn in as a senator.

The senator's post was seen as a milestone in the modern political history of the PPP.

This year also saw Kayveas being appointed the deputy minister of housing and local government, the first time a representative from the party is serving in a federal government post.

This being a non-election year, delegates at the party's 48th annual general assembly on Friday and Saturday are not expected to discuss anything new but may again touch on sensitive issues such as seat allocations.