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PPP-anniversary
THE 50-YEAR-OLD PPP AIMS TO RISE FROM ASHES

KUALA LUMPUR, April 1 (Bernama) -- The People's Progressive Party (PPP) once captured eight parliamentary and 12 state seats and was on the brink of forming an opposition government in Perak. It missed the golden opportunity due to a cross over of two elected members.

Such was the scenario in 1969, the year which also left an ugly scar on the country's unity due to political differences.

Now after 50 years, the PPP has no seats to show, not even in the state assembly. This was due to internal bickering among the leaders who also traded law suits against one another.

But this gloomy scenario in the party is about to change for good. In the last 10 years, the party initiated by the famous Seenivasagam brothers of Ipoh, had somewhat seen a sense of direction.

The PPP had a fresh breath of air when in 1993 current president Datuk M. Kayveas took over the helm of the party. He transformed the party, once a thorn in the Barisan Nasional (BN) due to its internal problems, into a party which was given a deputy ministership in January 2001 by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"We had a long struggle. When I took over the leadership of PPP it was in shambles. There were no records of our members...we had nothing. I had a good team of people dedicated to building the party and I think now we are enjoying fruits of our labour," said Kayveas in an interview with Bernama.

PPP was formed in 1953 by the Seenivasagam brothers mainly as an opposition party to the then Alliance. For a short period during the struggle for Independence, it joined the Alliance but withdrew to become an opposition party again.

But in 1973, the PPP became one of the founding members of the Barisan Nasional (BN) and many had thought then that it was the party to watch as PPP did not go by race or religion in its membership intake. It was a multiracial party suited to the needs of the country.

But that was not to be the case. Sadly, it was downhill from then on. In 1978, S.I. Rajah was elected as the third president of the party followed by Datuk Paramjit Singh in 1982. Tee Ah Chaun took over the helm of the party in 1985 and replaced by Datuk Mak Hon Kam as the sixth president of the PPP in 1988.

It was then that the law suits started. Following an injunction against Mak, S.I. Rajah became the acting president of the party. Kayveas took over 10 years ago as the seventh president after S.I. Rajah retired from active politics.

The lawyer turned politician, with all the law suits in the backdrop, then started a series of changes in the party. Firstly he changed the party logo to a six pointed blue star with letters PPP in the center of the star. The party also revised its 1953 constitution to be in line with the Umno constitution.

Growing from strength to strength, the party now is free of law suits and has some 380,000 members. It is now knocking on the doors of the BN for the seats it had lost due to the internal bickering.

"PPP members feel that the last ten years had seen an overhaul of the party...they have played their part in supporting the BN so it is only natural that we are given seats in the parliament and state assemblies. The deputy ministership given to me is a good indication that we might get something," said Kayveas.

The party would be celebrating its 50th Jubilee on April 10 and among events planned are a flag-raising ceremony and also a celebration of PPP's achievements and success.

The party plans to introduce a smart card for its members, containing details like a person's voting constituency and even banking facilities.

"We also intend to set up a structure like the BN in the party so that the various races in PPP can voice out their grouses or problems. We have not picked a name for it yet but it will be like a mini BN taking into account the various races we have," Kayveas added.

The Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister said there were races in the country which are not represented in the BN and through PPP's "mini BN" they would be able to reach out to the government politically.

While the party is aiming for the sky, there are lessons to be learnt from the 50-year-old party by other BN component parties or any other political party for that matter.

Internal bickering and problems should not be used by anyone for their gains, sidelining the struggles of the party and the aspirations of its members.

Disputes in any political party is a norm but when the differences reach to a point of no return one side has to back down for the sake of the party and its members.

The PPP is a prime example of how internal disputes can reduced a once high flying party to its knees and the difficulty faced by future leaders to rebuild the party and instil confidence in the party among its members.

-- BERNAMA

SR KHY ABG