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PPP-Elections (News Analysis)

CONFUSION REIGNS IN PPP OVER SEATS PRIOR TO GENERAL ELECTIONS

By: S.Retnanathan

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 25 (Bernama) -- A speculative media report and widespread rumours have thrown the People's Progressive Party (PPP) elections preparations into chaos, resulting in confusion among party members and motivation sinking to an all time low.

The party, which has spent the last two years preparing for the national polls, now seems lost, especially after strong rumours suggested that it would not be given a Parliamentary seat under the Barisan Nasional (BN) banner in the upcoming 11th general elections.

"There are rumours that we will only get a State seat in Perak. This is not fair to the party and its members. We have done a lot for the BN over the last 10 years. We have built ourselves up despite not having any seat since 1990," said a PPP State liaison chief, who declined to be named.

The Perak-born PPP was once a force to be reckoned with and were one seat short of forming the Perak State Government after the 1969 general elections.

The party joined the BN in 1973 armed with eight Parliamentary and 18 State seats but fared badly in the 1974 general elections, winning only won one Parliamentary and two State seats.

The downfall of the party was largely due to in-fighting among its leaders and in the 1990 general elections, the BN, realising that PPP's internal squabbles could hurt the ruling coalition, did not offer the party any seat to contest.

In 1993, lawyer (now Senator Datuk) M. Kayveas became the party President in the midst of some controversy and started rebuilding the party and it now boasts 380,000 members in 110 divisions. Kayveas was appointed a Senator and Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 2001.

The PPP President, now a Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, has over the last 24 months repeatedly told PPP members

to be patient while he asked the BN leadership to give PPP some seats in the coming general elections.

Expectations were high among party members that the PPP would be given "some seats" in this elections but the latest rumour, originating from Perak, and a newspaper report appear to have squashed their hopes.

On Monday, about 200 party members "gate-crashed" the Penang State BN Liaison Committee meeting at the Bukit Jambul Golf and Country Club demanding that Chief Minister Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon clarify the rumour.

They were disgruntled over an article in an English daily last Thursday which quoted sources as saying that the PPP would not be given any seat in the general elections, expected to be called anytime now.

Kayveas, contacted by Bernama, declined to confirm the accuracy of the newspaper report but admitted that he had met Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and BN Secretary-General Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob over the allocation of seats.

"The PPP members are a bit confused and angry after the rumour. All I can tell them is to let the BN top leadership decide on the matter. We will take it from there," he said.

Pressed further, Kayveas said he has not been told by the BN leadership that the PPP would be given seats in the polls nor had there been any indication that the party would come out empty-handed this time around.

He said the party had been loyal and sincere to the BN and it was now time for the ruling coalition to "reward" the PPP and its members by providing it with seats.

"Be calm, let us wait and see," was Kayveas' advice to his members, who seem to be in a quandry over the present situation facing the PPP.

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