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Keng Yaik: Building voter confidence in MCA and Gerakan now crucial

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GERAKAN president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik feels the only way to regain the trust of Chinese voters is for the party to quickly patch up old wounds and work closely with the new MCA leadership in an all-out confidence-building exercise.

Though the seasoned politician did not openly acknowledge that the MCA crisis may directly impact on Gerakan's performance in the general election, senior politicians have acknowledged that Gerakan may end up a casualty, purely because voters in some constituencies may not vote for any Chinese candidate from the Barisan Nasional, regardless whether he is from the MCA or Gerakan.

"There is not much time left. We have to move forward and work fast to build a new image which would be accepted by the voters, especially the Chinese.

"As long as the MCA is sincere in working with us I can assure you that Gerakan will respond positively, 100 per cent," he said.

He said Gerakan had already initiated confidence-building exercises by organising unity dinners with the MCA, which Dr Lim felt would go a long way to show a physical effort by both sides to build bridges.

"There is no more time for small talk. Both parties must be seen to be physically working together," he said.

Dr Lim cautioned that political parties must not divert their attention from preparing for the general election by focusing on other issues, like new seat allocations.

He said political parties must understand that the BN had gone through many seat allocation exercises and there were time-honoured BN traditions which would ensure a smooth process.

"If things get overheated and there is a huge public outcry and debate over seat allocations, it would only confuse voters and paint the impression that politicians are only interested in seats and not the country," he said.

Dr Lim, 64, who is also the Primary Industries Minister, joined the MCA in 1968 and was a rising star before he was expelled in 1973 for leading the MCA reform movement.

He joined Gerakan in 1974 and was party deputy president from 1976 to 1980, when he became the president. He has been the Primary Industries Minister since 1986.

He recently put to rest speculation that he would soon step down as a minister and party president when he announced he would defend his Bruas parliamentary seat in the next general election and continue leading the party "until the time is right".

"There is nothing to hide. I decided to stay on purely because I feel the country's political situation now needs my contribution, not just as Gerakan president, but my personal experience as a seasoned politician.

"As a party president, I have to take into account various considerations. Though I feel that one must go when it is time to go, it is vital that one chooses the right time to go." He said the transition of power from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was among the circumstances that prompted him to reconsider a decision he made three years ago on retiring.

Another was the resignation of former MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik.

"The new leadership is very young and I feel there is a need for me to stay on.

"However, I did not say I was going to stay forever!"

On Gerakan's role, he said the party would help the people cope with the rapid development around them, while ensuring that unity and tolerance are maintained and the attributes of a caring society are promoted.

Dr Lim attributed his successes in leading the biggest multi-racial party in the country to the guidance and leadership of Dr Mahathir.

In appreciation of this, Dr Lim will speak in detail of Dr Mahathir's contributions and sacrifices to the country in his speech entitled "The Legacy of Dr Mahathir" at the party's 32nd National Delegates Conference today.