

Accept 'growth pains', PKR members told
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With growth comes growth pains, and the opposition Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) is not exempted from this law of nature, said its vice-president R Sivarasa.

"Members must understand that they must allow for the party to grow and that with growth comes pains. The issues that have arisen are symptomatic of that growth," he said in an interview last week.

Sivarasa was asked to comment on claims that PKR had 'not walked the talk' on multi-racialism because it fielded Khalid Ibrahim instead of KS Nallakaruppan in the Ijok by-election.

He said those aggrieved have failed to understand the difference between PKR's 'genuine multi-racialism' on questions of public policy compared to Barisan Nasional (BN), as well as between the aims and nature of a by-election and general election.

Addressing the issue of Nallakaruppan's entry into the party, Sivarasa dismissed claims that he is among those wary of Nallakaruppan bringing in the 'MIC culture'.

In fact, Sivarasa pointed out, he was among those who had sought out Nallakaruppan - a former MIC Youth leader - to join PKR.

"The party must keep ensuring there is space to incorporate fresh leadership. Whether it's Khalid Ibrahim, Nalla or (Sabah PKR leader) Dr Jeffrey Kitingan, I hope there will be others like them," he said.

"Some people were uncomfortable - until today some have expressed reservations - with Nallakaruppan's entry given his background in MIC. Such reservations are normal in any party.

"But just because they were in the ruling coalition, are we to keep them out? And given their experience and standing, are we to treat them as ordinary members who have to go up the ranks of branch leadership then onto division leadership before they can be part of the party's national leadership? I don't subscribe to the view that leaders who come into the party have to go through some kind of 'probationary period'.

"If we are to treat every entry into Keadilan in such a judgmental way, how are we to grow? Members should give such people time to do work and prove their worth. In fact, we have seen over the past months, since Nalla's entry, renewed interest by Indians in Keadilan."

He was referring to the entry of significant numbers of Indians since Nallakaruppan joined last August.

'Active interest'

Sivarasa said the challenges raised with regard to new members and complaints about the way the divisions' annual general meetings had been conducted, are also part of growth

pains and should be viewed in a positive light.

"It shows there is an active interest in joining the party," he said.

He dismissed as a "non-issue" the allegations that Nallakaruppan (photo) had undermined his role as an Indian leader or had taken away his "Indian supporters".

"I made it clear three years ago when I was voted in as vice-president that I acknowledge that 80 percent of my votes were from Malay members.

"Over the years, I have articulated on issues that cut across the (communal) board, and have sought for Chinese and Malay leaders to come out on those issues traditionally seen as 'Indian issues' such as Tamil education, temple demolitions, or custodial deaths."

This is partly due to his limitations in connecting to grassroots Indian supporters - Sivarasa does not speak Tamil - but Sivarasa also acknowledged that he has consciously avoided being seen as a leader only of the Indian community.

"I do not want to and have never sought a role as a leader just of the Indians. That would undermine the multi-racial and other political values the party is trying to develop," he said.

In this regard, said Sivarasa, new entrants such as Nallakaruppan would have to adjust to the multi-racial values of PKR and its stand on social justice and human rights.

Nallakaruppan has notably toned down his pronouncements of being a 'leader of the Indians' in the party, said Sivarasa.

"Now, he speaks of being a leader for all members, Indians and non-Indians."

Having said that, Sivarasa rejected allegations that his chances of remaining one of PKR's three vice-presidents in the upcoming party elections have been reduced by Nallakaruppan's lead in terms of nominations.

Sivarasa said he is only trailing by about five nominations to Nallakaruppan, who is said to have received support from about 25 divisions.

Currently in the lead for the vice-presidency are Lee Boon Chye, Mustapa Kamil Ayub and Fuziah Salleh.

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