

Umno behind Koh's delay in naming successor?

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by Susan Loone

Several quarters in Gerakan are disappointed that their president Koh Tsu Koon has yet to quit as Penang BN chairperson despite having said that he would pass the baton to someone acceptable by the coalition partners.

News about Koh (right) quitting Penang politics had purportedly been swirling inside the BN camp for two weeks but it is unclear when he would actually commit himself.

Sources close to the situation say that Koh has "betrayed" his choice of successor - the party's secretary general Teng Chang Yeow - after meeting him twice over the matter, apparently to tell him to be ready to take over.

Keen observers would feel a sense of dejavu when in 2008, there was also a tussle over who - Teng, Dr Teng Hock Nan or Chia Kwang Chye - would succeed Koh when he quit the chief minister's post to contest as a parliamentary candidate. But in the election, the party disastrously lost its power base in Penang to Pakatan.

Teng, a former state executive councillor, recently told Malaysiakini that he was prepared to accept the challenge to lead his party into the coming general election, which could be called early next year but which is not due until 2013.

Succession a 'sensitive issue'

It is learnt that Koh had to be "pressed" by Umno to hand over his post to Penang Gerakan vice-chief Ong Thean Lye, instead of Teng.

Umno can influence such decisions as the appointment of state BN chiefs are in the hands of its president, Prime Minister Najib Razak, who is also BN national chairperson.

Koh, who was supposed to raise the issue at yesterday's BN supreme council meeting, did not do so, and the matter is left hanging in the air, much to the chagrin of party insiders who want to see changes in the BN state leadership before the polls.

Hock Nan (right), who is state Gerakan chief, who is said to prefer Ong to Teng, was cautious about commenting on the controversy affecting the party.

"It is a very sensitive issue and I did not even ask Koh about it (when he is quitting to make way for a new state BN chief)," he told Malaysiakini.

He was quick to add that "Koh merely said he was willing to resign (and hand over his post to an acceptable candidate) but he did not say when he would do it".

Premature to speculate

Meanwhile, Ong denied he was aware of his possible appointment as state BN chief, dismissing any knowledge of those "spreading this kind of information".

On Umno favouring him as BN state chief instead of Teng, Ong denied it could decide the matter on its own.

"We have five component parties in Penang and the chief has to lead the whole team, therefore the person needs to have the support of all," he added.

Ong, however, said it was still uncertain who would replace Koh, who is currently a federal minister, should he surrender the BN state chief post and that it was too premature to speculate who would replace him.

"You must wait until he quits. Only then comes the question of who is the next chief," he said.

Regarding the two meetings between Koh and Teng, who is a former Padang Kota assemblyperson, Ong said the duo could have met "privately".

"On whether he (Teng) is willing to take over Koh's post, I better not comment as all this is mere speculation," he quipped.

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