

'Teng Chang Yeow to be Penang BN chief'

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by Susan Loone

Prime Minister and BN chairperson Najib Abdul Razak decided on Tuesday the person who will replace Gerakan president Koh Tsu Koon as the new Penang BN chief, a reliable BN source said..

teng chang yeow gerakan secretary general According to the source, Najib has rejected Penang Gerakan vice-chairperson Ong Thean Lye and opted for the party's secretary-general Teng Chang Yeow (left) to take over from Koh.

The reasons for the rejection of Ong and acceptance of Teng are unclear, but the announcement to appoint Teng is expected to be made on Saturday, by Koh himself, when he will also announce his "ultimate sacrifice" - stepping down as state BN chief.

The announcement will be made after Koh chairs Gerakan's central committee meeting at the Wawasan Universiti in Penang.

Several reforms

At the party's headquarters in Kuala Lumpur today, Koh merely announced that he would not contest in the coming general election, which is expected to be called early next year but not due until 2013.

He also announced several reforms for the party's renewal, and said he had indicated to Najib about his willingness to give up the Penang BN chief's post.

But party members appeared disappointed with Koh today.

Penang Gerakan legal and human rights bureau chief Baljit Singh (right) said Koh's announcement that he will not stand for GE was a "foregone conclusion and nothing new".

Baljit conceded that the announcement was good but not enough as the grassroots had spoken and were waiting for more 'sacrifices', not only from Koh but from the other leaders as well.

Feedback from the grassroots on how the party could move forward, after suffering its worst defeat ever in the 2008 general election, indicate that senior leaders ought to make way for younger blood.

Baljit said the leaders must take bold steps to lead the party into reform.

"The grassroots have spoken loud and clear. Penangites are waiting for Koh to step down as state BN chief and pass on the leadership to someone else," he told Malaysiakini.

However, Baljit reminded members not to forget the "Port Dickson spirit" when seeking for new leadership.

In Port Dickson in 1980, former Gerakan president Dr Lim Chong Eu had faced a similar situation and intended to step down as party president.

Lim, then Penang chief minister, had wanted to hand over his leadership to Paul Leong, but another Gerakan stalwart, and now party adviser, Dr Lim Keng Yaik, was also interested in the post.

"Lim said that leaders must be democratically elected, so an election was held and Lim stayed neutral. Finally, Keng Yaik won the presidency, and ever since then, Lim stayed out of politics. Everybody must learn from this spirit," Baljit said.

Koh still baggage for Gerakan

Another grassroots leader, Yeap Ban Choon from Geraklah Gerakan, a pressure group, also appeared disappointed with Koh's much-awaited but diluted announcement.

"What he should have done is announce he is quitting as party president and state BN chief, but stay on as party adviser.

"Leave the leadership in new hands. As long as Koh is still president and state BN chief, he is baggage to the party," he said.

Yeap (left) speculated that Koh seemed to be buying time and stalling his departure from the party leadership, as the elections are around the corner.

"He would have been more respected if he accepted the responsibility for the losses of the coalition and steps down as party president at the end of this year, when his term ends," Yeap added.

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