

Hilmi: Koh yet to discuss state chief post with partners
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by Susan Loone

Penang BN secretary Hilmi Yahya said that Koh Tsu Koon has yet to discuss with coalition partners who is to replace him when he gives up his position as state BN chief.

Hilmi, who is state Umno information chief, said that Koh, who is Gerakan president, is expected to make an announcement over the matter this week.

However, Hilmi (left) is uncertain on what day the announcement would be made, or whether it would be declared in Penang or KL, by Koh himself or by Prime Minister and BN chief Najib Abdul Razak.

When told that the new state BN chief post may go to Gerakan secretary-general Teng Chang Yeow, as reported in the media, Hilmi said it does not matter who takes over the position.

The BN coalition partners would have to work with the individual to ensure the party's success in the coming general election, he added.

"Whoever it is, he has to work hard to achieve our goals. At least, he has to try to help us improve out strength in the state assembly, if we cannot take over the state government," said Hilmi when met outside the Penang High Court today.

"This is the worst-case scenario. It is better if we can take over," he smiled.

Members want new blood

Koh has kept interested parties waiting since last week, but he eventually announced on Thursday that he would not be contesting the coming 13th general election.

Grassroot members who want "new and young blood" to lead the BN want Koh to give up his Gerakan president and state BN chief posts, and the former Penang chief minister has indicated his willingness to do so.

However, on Saturday, he declared that he will not give up his position as Gerakan president, which he democratically holds until the end of December 2011, as the party was preparing for the looming elections.

On the new state chief, Hilmi said that BN needs to increase its representation in the state assembly despite currently having 11 Umno reps in the August House.

The Teluk Bahang assemblyperson said that the Umno reps are often unaware of what issues were affecting the Chinese and Indian communities unless "they tell us".

New state BN committee

On his position as state BN secretary, Hilmi said that when a new state BN chief takes over the leadership, a new committee would be formed.

"I don't know yet. It is up to the new state BN chief to decide. It is only natural that we step down if the new state BN chief appoints new people," said the former Penang deputy chief minister.

Meanwhile, Hilmi was asked about the suggestion by local-based NGO, Penang Malay Congress, that Umno should take over as the state BN chief instead of Gerakan.

The NGO, which claims to represent 640,000 Malays in Penang, suggested that Umno should lead Penang as it has bigger representation, including more members in the party, to ensure that the community is not marginalised.

In response, Hilmi said BN would abide by the "old arrangement" (Gerakan leads) because the partners would always make decisions based on consensus.

"It does not matter who leads the state BN. Whether we have bigger or smaller representation or seats, our decisions has to be agreed by all. There has been no problem so far," explained Hilmi.

"There is no question that the interest of the Malays would be not guaranteed. There is no question we (Umno) want to take over the CM post. We never even thought about it," he added.

"If you look at our history, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the ex-premier, had said that even if Gerakan wins only one seat, it would hold the Penang chief minister's post," he added.

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