

We will manage Umno, says Teng

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By Susan Loone

INTERVIEW Gerakan was battered in the last general election mostly due to its association with ‘big brother’ Umno, and questions abound as to how the party will overcome this problem.

But newly-minted state BN chief Teng Chang Yeow sees the issue as manageable, saying that the situation within the coalition is no different from the DAP having to face PAS’ Islamisation agenda.

Teng (*right*), in an interview with *Malaysiakini*, said just as DAP has to explain its links with PAS, so do MCA and Gerakan, which have to clarify their roles in BN to the electorate.

When asked how Gerakan will manage Umno in the coming polls, especially in Chinese-majority areas, Teng said that “everyone needs to manage everyone else”.

“There is no shortage of Chinese chauvinists in MCA and Gerakan as well, so who is going to manage them?” he queried.

“We have to manage not just Umno or MIC. The MIC needs to manage the Chinese, while Umno also needs to manage the Chinese chauvinists.

“We all need to have a very good understanding of each other,” he added.

Teng, who is Gerakan secretary-general, admits it is not an easy task to manage people, just as Pakatan Rakyat needs to manage the diverse relationships among DAP, PAS and PKR.

He asked: “How long can PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim hold two hot potatoes?”

He also wonders if Pakatan can guarantee that PAS’ Islamic policies will not affect non-Muslims, asking, “Can DAP stick to Pakatan even if PAS implements extreme hudud law?”

‘Judge BN equally’

Teng described DAP’s ‘divorce’ from PAS in 2001 over the Islamic state issue and then returning to the Barisan Alternatif coalition as “irresponsible”.

He added that the DAP should not hold on to the coalition merely for electoral success but any engagement should be long-term as they owe it to Malaysians to be consistent.

“Whatever you say about the BN, when there were extreme views within the rank and file in Umno, we stayed behind and argued internally because we view this as our responsibility to the people,” he said.

Teng was also asked about Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak’s 1Malaysia project which does not synchronise with his [silence](#) over the actions of Malay rights pressure group Perkasa, which on many occasions have hurt the feelings of non-Malays.

Instead, he turned the tables on Pakatan, saying that the DAP has also been silent on PAS and gagged its leaders for speaking publicly, where they were told to discuss the matter internally.

“When DAP can practise internal discussion, other parties cannot? I do not know how a ruler is manufactured in this country. We have to use the same yardstick for the other side,” he said.

“When there is an issue in the BN, Gerakan and the MCA must come out to whack others openly but Pakatan is allowed to discuss matters internally and issue gag orders?” he queried.

“In Gerakan, if our president issues a gag order, he will be challenged. President Koh Tsu Koon has been whacked left, right and centre for 18 years,” he stressed.

“Anyone can criticise him, from Gerakan to Umno or MCA. Does the ruling party in Penang (Pakatan) allow their members to criticise them openly?” he asked.

‘No beating round the bush’

Meanwhile, Teng, who is considered sharp-tongued and brazen, says he cannot help but be straightforward when dealing with people.

Before his appointment as state BN leader, speculation was rife that he was not a favourite with Umno as he is not considered a ‘yes man’.

However, after his appointment by Najib on April 22, another extreme view by the DAP emerged, describing him as an ‘Umno puppet’.

Teng said it was inborn in him, where throughout his experience, he had always had his own mind and spoke what he felt was right for the people.

“We need to be more tactful, inclusive. But we need to be truthful as well. Truth hurts, but when we have to tell the truth, we must tell,” he said.

“But how to tell the truth, whether bluntly or tactfully? Beating around the bush is not in my character,” he added.

“Over the years, I have always been straightforward about what I think. It is not my intention to hurt, but just my intention to tell the truth,” he stressed.