

I am no one's poodle, says Gerakan's Baljit

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By Susan Loone

The challenger for the Penang Gerakan chief's post, Baljit Singh, has refuted allegations that he is a proxy of "someone" in the contest against former state BN chief Teng Chang Yeow for the post.

penang bn press conference baljit singh Baljit, 47 (left), was referring to allegations that he is a proxy of outgoing state chief Dr Teng Hock Nan, and that he has been "forced and manipulated" to contest.

"I am no one's proxy. As a courtesy, I called to inform Dr Teng about my candidacy. So did Chang Yeow. He, too, called and informed our outgoing chairperson," Baljit told a press conference today.

"I belong to no one. I only belong to Gerakan. I am very open about this."

Nominations for the state chief's post opened yesterday but Baljit was absent and was accused of "avoiding or running away" from his contender.

During the press conference, he produced a boarding pass from Firefly and an invitation card, saying he was absent yesterday because he had to attend a wedding in Kuala Lumpur.

"I did not run away. I am very serious about this contest. This is not a game," he said firmly.

He was flanked by several top state Gerakan leaders like vice-chiefs Dr Lim Boon Beng and Ong Thean Lye, secretary Lim Boon Han, division chief Teoh Jit Meng (Kepala Batas), bureau chiefs Dr Thor Teong Ghee (information, communications and publicity) and Tan King Chee (a veteran).

Boon Han and Tan are division chiefs for Nibong Tebal and Bagan respectively.

Lim had put in the nomination papers for Baljit at the state Gerakan headquarters.

Facing an 'uphill task'

Baljit is said to face an uphill task against Teng, the Gerakan secretary-general, who has the support of 10 division chiefs and Youth head Oh Tong Keong.

But Baljit said the party's 399 delegates are "independent" and may think and vote differently for their division heads.

To get people to vote for him, Baljit said "Don't love Teng less but love Gerakan more".

Baljit appeared confident of victory, saying: "I am not alone, I have a team with me, who are willing to take the party to the next level."

NONETeng (right) also faces some opposition from his peers, who insist the party needs "rejuvenation and reform, otherwise there will be no future for its members".

Yet there were 14 nominations for Teng, which Baljit described as "the first step in spoiling party unity".

"We need only one nomination paper to be filed, there is no need for so many," he quipped.

Based on the support for the two contestants, it is clear that there is a struggle between those who support the leadership of Hock Nan and Chang Yeow.

"But there is no fight between Chang Yeow and me. I just want to give Gerakan delegates an alternative," Baljit said.

Short, middle and long term plans

On his vision for Gerakan should he win, Baljit said he has short-, middle- and long-term plans.

He wants to restore party unity by reconnecting with the grassroots, veterans and women members, and promote training on party principles and struggles, as well as encourage multi-racialism.

Boasting a team of young leaders without political baggage, Baljit said he would lead Gerakan to be an outspoken and effective party that has Penangites at heart.

azlan "We will speak without fear or favour. We will tell Perkasa to shut up and sit down," he said of the ultra-Malay rights NGO.

As head of the party's legal and human rights bureau, Baljit is well-known for speaking up on a variety of issues, including those related to conversion and

freedom of assembly.

Asked how will his leadership shed the impression that Gerakan is afraid to stand up against 'big brother Umno', Baljit said he has always spoken on issues even when this was not in sync with other component parties in the BN.

On how would he fare in the election since most delegates are Chinese and may vote for someone of their own race, Baljit said he believes the delegates are multiracial in outlook and mature enough.

Only "low-class politicians" would play the racial card, he noted.

The state delegates' conference and polling day will be held on Sept 15.

The winner will take over from Teng, who has helmed the party in the state since 2008.

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