

Some Gerakan grassroots asking Baljit to withdraw

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By Susan Loone

Some voices among the Gerakan party's grassroots are already humming for there to be no contest for the Penang chairperson post, indirectly backing former state BN chief Teng Chang Yeow for the post.

NONEYeap Ban Choon, spokesperson for Geraklah Gerakan (Gg), a grassroots movement within the party, has asked Teng's challenger Baljit Singh to reconsider his decision, saying, "I do not know why Baljit wants to contest."

"I felt sad to note that Baljit wants to contest as he would be better as a state committee member," Yeap told Malaysiakini, when contacted.

Gg was instrumental in pushing for an emergency general meeting on Oct 10, 2010, to declare a vote of no confidence against state chief Dr Teng Hock Nan, after the party lost Penang to Pakatan Rakyat in the 2008 polls.

Teng, however, managed to keep his post when the motion was rejected by a few votes.

Yeap urged all 399 delegates who will be voting this Sunday for their new chief and a new state committee, to vote for "the best person to do the job and not for any team or camps".

Keen political observers note that the two camps represent the struggle between the "old guards or veterans" and the younger team led by Chang Yeow.

Yeap was happy though to see 14 members come forward to contest for the six state committee posts, saying, "This is a good sign despite Gerakan being rejected by the voters in the general election."

"Many of these 14 contestants are not aligned to anyone. Nor have they ever contested for the posts before. This is a good sign that democracy is alive in the party," said Yeap, who is also a delegate.

Baljit heads the legal and human rights bureau and has been rather outspoken on various issues related to human rights and freedom and controversial issues such as conversion of non-Muslim minors to Islam.

Continuing the influence of the 'old guards'

But he is mostly seen by certain quarters as aligned to Dr Teng, the outgoing chief, and is perceived as trying to continue the "old guards' influence in the party".

Some party insiders view Baljit's challenge as the veterans trying to "exert their influence" in the new leadership.

However, today, the practising lawyer vehemently refuted these allegations, saying, "I am no one's proxy and I belong to no one but Gerakan."

He also said that his leadership, if accepted by the delegates, would show that Gerakan is a truly multi-racial party although most of its members are Chinese.

NONEA former delegate, lawyer and human rights activist Clement Ong (left), who can be described as "independent", has openly campaigned for Baljit to win the post.

Although he resigned from the party in 2010, he says he is still a stakeholder and voter as this concerns Penang's future.

Ong said that Penang is in "dire need" of a strong opposition with sincerity and integrity, to check and balance the present government led by Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng.

Since the May 5 polls, where Gerakan failed to obtain any seats as it did in 2008, the party leaders have been rather silent on issues affecting the people in Penang.

Ong said Baljit is a leader with "conscience" and only those with such qualities can regain the confidence of the people.

"I have worked with Baljit on various occasions and he has spoken fearlessly in championing democratisation and safeguarding constitutional rights and defending universal values," he said.

"Though we do not (always) share the same views on issues, he is always consistent with his views and is articulate in his reasoning."

It would be interesting to note the outcome of this contest, as the state Gerakan chief by convention assumes the post of Penang chief minister, should the BN manage to capture the state in the coming elections.

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