

Opposition fired up over Koh's poor record
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The opposition is set to use Penang Chief Minister Dr Koh Tsu Koon's dismal report card as the perfect platform to regain lost grounds in the state in the forthcoming general election.

They believe that Koh's elevation as Gerakan acting president would make the party vulnerable and pave the way for a better electoral performance by the opposition.

DAP national vice-chairperson Zulkifli Mohd Nor believes that Koh's dismal record would make the party more susceptible now.

"His baggage would give us more ammunition to hit out at Gerakan and grab more seats in Penang," he said.

Gerakan won 14 state and four parliamentary seats in the 2004 elections. Penang has 40 state and 13 federal seats.

Penang PKR deputy chief Cheah Kah Peng said under Koh's poor leadership for the past 17 years, the state socio-economic development had suffered a free fall.

It has dropped from being the top state in foreign direct investment (FDI) in 1990 to fifth position today and would drop further, he said.

"The state public transport system, once among the country's best, is now virtually non-existent and the tourism sector is lagging far behind Langkawi and Malacca, let alone regional destinations such as Phuket, Hatyai and Bali.

Moving to federal?

"Other pressing issues are the shortage of affordable housing for the lower income group, lack of business opportunities, rising unemployment rate, brain drain and escalating cost of living.

"Indeed, if Koh remains as CM, the opposition has a better chance to capture Penang," said Cheah.

Penang DAP secretary Danny Law Heng Keng said the general feeling among Penangites was that Koh's imminent departure to the federal cabinet would be a 'plus' to them.

Casual conversations among the grassroots and the educated middle class revealed that they were delighted Koh would leave Penang for good.

Even traditional BN voters did not spare Koh, describing him as a 'flop'. Many believe that Koh would have moved to federal politics anyway because of his poor legacy in Penang even if he was not promoted in Gerakan.

Koh's poor leadership has also irked Penang MTUC chief Abdul Razak Abdul Hamid who lamented that the state had become a major gateway for illegal foreign workers in the past

10 years.

"Illegal workers arrive in Penang to move on to other states for employment. When they can't get work in other states, their agents get them jobs in Penang, thus depriving employment opportunities for locals.

"Unemployment rate among locals has been rising due to lack of FDI while Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and China had successfully lured multi-billion investments at Penang's expense.

"Koh has not tackled these issues despite our numerous complaints," said Abdul Razak, who contested the Bagan Dalam state seat on a PKR ticket in 2004.

Failed to keep promises

Apart from his poor performance as CM, Koh is also ridiculed as a man who failed to keep his promises.

PAS National Unity Bureau chief Mujahid Yusof Rawa recalled that Koh promised "to bring about changes within BN", when he joined Gerakan in the early 1980s.

"Until today he has not done it. Now he is in a position to fulfill his original promises, such as fighting injustice, inequality and corruption within the BN," he added.

The opposition's optimism is boosted by the fact that over the years Gerakan had become overdependent on Umno to deliver votes.

With PKR and PAS making inroads in the Malay areas of late, the opposition cannot be faulted if they start to believe that their day is near.

They are likely to flash Koh's bad report card to fish votes all over Penang in the coming elections.

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