

Not need for Tsu Koon to fade into obscurity
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Penang Forever

Former Penang Chief Minister Dr Koh Tsu Koon was a gentleman in every sense of the word when he not only conceded defeat but also worked towards ensuring a smooth transition of power to the new incoming DAP/PKRM coalition government in Penang on March 8. In contrast, Penang Umno were sore losers, venting their frustration by illegal demos against the new Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng to create racial tension.

Obviously Penang Umno, long accustomed to Malay political hegemony over the non-Malays, could not accept a situation where it and its lackeys had been defeated via the ballot box. It therefore went along with the lies spun by Utusan Malaysia and Bernama on the marginalisation of the Penang Malays and the ultimate challenge to Ketuanan Melayu by the incoming administration.

This was because they could not refute Guan Eng's assertion at his first media conference for transparency in the award of future government projects based on open tenders, exposing a much abused and undesirable NEP practice of awarding projects to Umno/BN cronies which had bred widespread nepotism and corruption.

Hence their wildcard defence was to play the racial card in accusing the Penang government of wanting to abolish the NEP to sideline the Penang Malays when it was clear to all and sundry that Guan Eng had no intentions of doing so. Utusan and Bernama had completely blacked out the news that the first thing Guan Eng did after becoming Chief Minister was to visit Tanjung Tokong, an enclave of poor Penang Malays, to assure them of whatever economic help they would need.

Penang Umno was even prepared to cut its nose to spite its own face in calling on the federal government to stop mega-projects for Penang such as the proposed Second Bridge, the Penang outer ring road, etc in an attempt to sabotage the new Penang government. Koh has rightly come out to call on the federal govt not to renege on its previous pledges of economic development for Penang as reflected in those mega projects.

Lambasting Penang Umno on that score was something which Koh lacked the courage to do when he was Chief Minister in the previous Umno-controlled Penang state government. Now that Koh has finally got the big Umno burden off his shoulders, perhaps he should not waste his time in trying to revive a dead horse like the Gerakan for the simple reason that Umno would not appreciate it.

Even when Gerakan, MCA and MIC had representation in Penang, Umno tend to ride roughshod over them. Now with their total and complete annihilation, Umno would tend to despise them even more.

Gerakan leaders such as Koh, Kerk Choo Ting, Dr Toh Kin Woon, Dominic Puthuchery and others had high hopes of reforming the BN from within when their party joined the BN coalition in the early 1970s. The complete rout of the Gerakan in Penang in this year's general election will finally convince them that their motive has failed with Umno not wanting to tone down its racist policies, let alone give them up altogether.

In succumbing to Umno's racist policies, Gerakan over the years, lost the original

multi-racial orientation it was formed with 40 years ago. When it was completely routed in Penang on March 8, Gerakan had ended up as a rump Chinese party, no better than the MCA, failing to defend Chinese rights vis-a-vis Umno in the BN.

While Kerk, Toh and Dominic have all faded into obscurity, Koh can still play a useful political role for the people of Penang in his individual capacity. Koh can still make use of his vast experience as a former Chief Minister and international connections to help the new DAP/PKR coalition state government get off the ground, work towards establishing a strong and clean government and consolidate this in the next 4 or 5 years.

Should this be successful, the people will reward the Penang government with another five-year mandate in the next general election. And much of the credit would no doubt go to Koh. I'm sure Guan Eng, scouting for talent and experience to help his new government in the Herculean task of good governance, will welcome the valuable contributory role of Koh as adviser.

It is high time Koh calls it quits with Umno which had no respect for Gerakan in the first place. If he can, Koh should also take Gerakan out of the BN, revert to its original multi-racial stance and merge with DAP or PKR as these are multi-racial parties in orientation.

This will give the much needed boost to multi-racial politics which is beginning to see a new dawn in the country after voters rejected the communal politics of the BN.

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