

Don't hold breath for radical Gerakan reform
Malaysiakini.com
Apr 11, 2008
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Gerakan top leaders are going around the country to meet up with their respective state leadership. The initiative is good but is the motive the same? Dr Koh Tsu Koon is working very hard to consolidate support for himself as the new president of Gerakan despite the disastrous defeat suffered by his party in the recent general election. MCPX

This is the contentious part. Lee Kah Choon (KC) believes that Koh should step down as its acting president and allow an early party election to take place. Meanwhile, division leaders who supported Koh have accused KC for trying to undermine the 'reform' process.

Observers are curious to know how Gerakan is going to be reformed if its leadership, especially those who had a hand in the embarrassing tussle for the chief ministerial position in Penang, is going to remain the same old people. The leadership is also still seen as dragging its feet to do something drastic and solid to reverse the flagging fortunes of the party.

These are the two main reasons which prompted KC to resign from all positions and reiterate his call for a new mandate.

Rumours are that Koh would probably relinquish his state chairmanship of Gerakan Penang to someone else. However, KC is expected to face great resistance if he tries to go for the state's top post. Penang is still regarded by the party as its base, rightly or wrongly. Hence, the new state chairman will be given the task of wresting back the state from DAP and its alliance in Pakatan Rakyat.

Another strong rival, Chia Kwang Chye, could go in between KC and his desire to lead Penang. Chia's supporters are still bitter over the way he was bundled out of the race. However, given the uneasy relationship between Koh and Chia over this issue, the former may just put his support behind KC should a contest materialise between the two.

KC will have to choose between the two camps. On one hand is the man who put him on a CMship musical chairs and on the other is a man who was his ally but grew apart leading up to the polls.

Can Chia overcome his distrust of KC and support the latter to become the next state chairman? It will be a hard choice for KC. If Chia gives way, his dream of making a comeback in Penang evaporates. It appears that there is only enough room for one.

Even if KC wins in a contest, it will be difficult for him to find enough credible people to lead an onslaught on Penang. He and his team must be prepared to commit the next 10 years to have any hope of making a comeback. In politics, 10 days is already a long time.

The next possible scenario is for him to take on Koh for the top position. Although Koh will probably be challenged at the next party polls, there are actually three possible candidates who may take up the task - Dr Tan Kee Kwong, KC Lee and Chia Kwang Chye.

However, this contest will be much harder than the state contest where Koh will readily give way knowing that it is difficult for him to make a comeback in Penang.

For sure, Koh can count on the support of Dr Lim Keng Yaik who still commands the support of the party's Central Committee and the Central Working Committee. Lim is expected to rally support for his handpicked successor whom he dubbed as the best man to lead Gerakan after him. Moreover, his legacy is at stake if Koh is defeated.

Among the three candidates, only Chia can expect to pose a serious challenge against Koh. But it is not in his veins to challenge the party leadership. Chia is expected to stay neutral and go for the number two position if given the opportunity.

Hence, if KC goes for the top position we might see a reunion of Koh and his one-time special assistant Chia. It is not possible for KC to contest alone. He needs a team of 7 credible leaders - president, deputy president, 3 VPs, treasurer and secretary-general.

From the two scenarios, it is obvious that Koh has an upper hand. Unless KC is willing to forge an alliance with the man he criticises prior to his resignation, it will be meaningless for him to use his resignation as a catalyst for change.

With the central committee, state and division leaders firmly behind both Koh and Dr Lim, a change in the leadership is not going to be possible. Perhaps what the leadership is trying to do is to 'reinvent' Koh and re-brand him as a man who is still committed to the party's cause.

It is obvious that Koh is trying to divert the blame put on him to national sentiments. Dr Lim just told him to 'shut up and continue working'. Hence, do not hold your breath to witness a radical reform in Gerakan. In the party, slow and steady is the trend. In another words, leaders are told 'not to rock the boat'.

KC just did the opposite and it appears that he is not going to gain much unless he is willing to embrace a slow and steady attitude and follow the current tempo. Otherwise, conflicting interests, mutual distrust and powerful brokers in the party are surely going to derail his intention to reform and lead the party.

KC said he disagrees with Koh's leadership style and unless he changes his mind, he may find himself either booted out or resigned from the party. Either way, Gerakan loses KC Lee.