

Penang CM ready to take rap for taking in 'BN virus'
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Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng is ready to take the rap if his policy to appoint political leaders from the state opposition Barisan Nasional coalition backfires.
MCPX

He also acknowledged that he was taking a big risk in absorbing 'BN virus' into the DAP-led Pakatan Rakyat state administration.

"I know that I am taking a big risk," he said when asked whether he was inviting "BN political virus" to his administration.

However, the Penang government has adopted an open-minded policy and political governance because Lim did not believe in the "winner takes all and loser loses all" policy.

"Just because BN political leaders have lost in the elections, it does not mean they are not good enough to serve in the government," he said.

Lim maintained that his administration would appoint anyone, regardless of their political affiliations, religious beliefs and ethnicity, if one can conform to the state's CAT criteria - competency in a government that can deliver accountability in line with democratic principles and transparency.

"The state government believes in this. I am prepared to take the rap and would not run away from responsibility if the policy backfires," he told a press conference in Penang yesterday.

People not ready

Lim was responding to criticisms by party grassroots leaders, members and the public on his state administration policy to appoint BN leaders in key government posts in Penang.

He later told Malaysiakini that criticisms against the state government's policy was triggered perhaps because the public was caught unprepared with the new phenomena of political governance.

"It's possible the public was not ready with a sudden change in approach and attitude of political governance.

"I'm sure they would absorb and adapt to it in the long run," said Lim.

Asked why his administration did not appoint councillors from BN to complement the new style of governance, he said it could not be done the council positions were politically crucial and vital link for the state government to carry out public projects.

"Lee's post was merely to woo foreign investors to Penang," said Lim, whose policy even incurred the wrath of his party's chairperson Karpal Singh.

lee kah choon and lim guan eng 230408Karpal has chided Lim for appointing former Gerakan deputy secretary-general Lee Kah Choon as the executive chairman of InvestPenang and a director in Penang Development Corporation (PDC).

In a move to strengthen and stabilise political backing from his own party to Lim's state government, a dialogue session has been arranged for May Day between the DAP state leadership and executive councillors, and party branch leaders and members.

The dialogue session is aimed at providing DAP grassroots an opportunity for the first time since the March 8 polls to get first-hand information on the goings-on in the DAP-led state government.

The session is expected to be a fiery one as grassroots leaders and members were expected to raise contentious issues to the leadership, including Lee's hopping from Gerakan to embrace the DAP administration.

Lee, a former parliamentary secretary to the Health Ministry and Jelutong MP, quit all his party posts but remained a Gerakan member prior to his appointments.

However, following criticisms from various quarters, including from Prime Minister and BN chief Abdullah Badawi, Gerakan acting chairperson Dr Koh Tsu Koon and former Gerakan president Dr Lim Keng Yaik, Lee resigned from the party.

The Kah Choon debacle

Several DAP grassroots leaders and members view Lee's paradigm shift from previous Gerakan administration to DAP's as a calculated political move to avoid being labeled as "a party hopper."

"Lee moved in as an employee to force Gerakan to take disciplinary action. He made a smart move by quitting after he was issued a show cause letter.

"Now he can join DAP and say that his hands were forced by Gerakan to make the political shift," said an insider.

However, the chief minister maintained the appointment of Lee was purely based on his state administration's CAT policy.

Lee, 48, who joined Gerakan in 1987, defeated Karpal for the Jelutong parliamentary seat in 1999 and retained the seat in 2004.

Lee was the Gerakan's chief ministerial candidate alongside party vice-president Dr Teng Hock Nan and Tanjung division chief Teng Chang Yeow prior to last month's general election.

However, he lost the Machang Bubok state seat to PKR's Tan Hock Leong and subsequently resigned from all his political posts.

Gerakan also lost Penang when DAP clinched 19 of the 40 state seats.

Besides Lee, five Umno assemblypersons – Mahmud Zakaria (Sungai Acheh), Dr Hilmi Yahaya (Teluk Bahang), Muhammad Farid Saad (Pulau Betong), Arif Shah Omar Shah

(Seberang Jaya) and Jahara Hamid (Teluk Air Tawar) were offered seats in various state administrative committees, while former Bukit Tambun elected representative Lai Chew Hock was offered the vice-chairperson post in the committee for the Penang International Dragon Boat Festival early this month.

Lai has accepted the post, while the five Umno men turned down the offers citing political differences as the main reason.

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