

**Why Gerakan should root for Anwar**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**Aug 22, 2008**  
**Ong Kian Ming and Oon Yeoh**

Gerakan has been in the public spotlight for the past few weeks, for reasons which its leadership would not have wanted. From the injunction taken out by a Gerakan leader to prevent the sale of a controversial book criticising former party president Lim Keng Yaik and acting president Koh Tsu Koon, to the proposal among the Perak Gerakan delegates to pull out of the Barisan Nasional, to former Gerakan state exco Toh Kin Woon's endorsement of Anwar's candidacy in Permatang Pauh and his subsequent resignation from Gerakan – it has not been a good couple of weeks for the party that once controlled Penang (for 38 years since 1969).

MCPX

debat of land scandal 200808 both on stageEven the one potential bright spot, the debate between Koh and the current Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng did not produce a consensus in favour of the former.

Gerakan is trapped between a rock and a hard place. It is playing the role of the opposition in its home state of Penang without having any seats in the state assembly. It is still part of the BN government at the federal level but it does not have any cabinet representation and only has a junior MP and an appointed senator as deputy ministers.

While Gerakan would never come out to say this, it makes political sense for them to secretly root for de facto PKR leader Anwar Ibrahim to take over the government so that BN would be in the position of opposition at the federal level. Here's why: It's the best of the three options Gerakan has.

### **Should it join Pakatan?**

Gerakan has three options in terms of its political future. Some have argued that it makes sense for Gerakan to leave the BN and join Pakatan Rakyat. After all, the ideals of Pakatan, on paper at least, are much more similar to Gerakan's than that which is espoused by the BN.

Gerakan has prided itself on being the 'conscience of the BN' by daring to speak up on issues such as human rights, anti-corruption and multiculturalism. Why not join Pakatan where multiculturalism is much more apparent and where the language of human rights and anti-corruption is common currency?

The political reality is such that while parties within Pakatan such as the DAP and PKR might publicly welcome Gerakan into its fold, Gerakan would be totally sidelined in politically critical decisions including the all important allocation of seats at the state and parliamentary levels.

koh tsu koon lim guan eng agenda daily debate on land scam issue 150808 01DAP would assert its right to contest in most of the Chinese majority seats and PKR would want to contest most of the mixed seats leaving Gerakan to pick up the remaining crumb. The option of joining Pakatan might seem like a good ideological fit but would leave Gerakan in an even weaker position politically, if this is imaginable.

Gerakan's second option would be to leave the BN and not join Pakatan but instead strike it out on its own as a third party. The record of third parties striking out on its own in the Malaysian context or elsewhere has not been good. Pekemas did not survive beyond the departure of its founder, Tan Chee Koon. PBS found that it was much more difficult to survive outside the BN on its own and eventually capitulated and rejoined the BN.

Gerakan can only justify its existence as a third party if it can win back control of the Penang state government on its own. But this will be almost impossible given that they cannot win the Malay majority seats. Knowing this, there is no reason for the non-Malay voters to vote in a Gerakan representative when they could choose between a DAP or PKR candidate on the one hand or an MCA candidate on the other, any one of whom would stand a better chance of being in the ruling state government compared to Gerakan.

### **Only acceptable choice**

Given these options, Gerakan is left with its most politically acceptable choice, which is to stick it out with the BN. However, if they had to choose between being in a BN coalition that was still in control of the federal government and one which is in the opposition, they would be wise to secretly root for the latter.

patrick lim and abdullah ahmad badawi and koh tsu koon 270906A BN that has lost power at the federal level would force it to adapt to life in the opposition and most importantly would force Umno to rethink how it wants to present its political message. Without experiencing life outside of government, there is little chance that the BN, as it is currently organised, will be able to deliver any of the substantive reforms which Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has promised time and time again.

The sidelining of Zaid Ibrahim, almost from the very beginning of his tenure as the de facto law minister in the PM's office, is but a very small indication of the near impossibility of reforming the BN while it is still holds power at the federal level.

Kicking out the BN at the federal level is arguably the only chance that Gerakan has to introduce the elements of reform within the BN. It is also the only opportunity for the BN to do some serious 'house cleaning' since the loss of power at the federal level would be as a result of defections from the BN to Pakatan and would presumably be accompanied by further defections.

Only then, can Gerakan, as part of a rejuvenated BN, hope to take on a potentially complacent or perhaps ineffective Pakatan government to come back into power, both at the state and federal level.