

Toh: Gerakan should consider merging with PKR
Malaysiakini.com
Sept 8, 2008
Praba Ganesan

Prominent politician and academician Dr Toh Kin Woon threw his former party Gerakan a curved ball today, suggesting it might be better off leaving the Barisan Nasional coalition and merging with PKR instead.

Toh, who left Gerakan last month after publicly supporting PKR leader Anwar Ibrahim during the Permatang Pauh by-election, said the idea might seem a little drastic but it was workable considering that both parties were committed to multi-cultural representation and had social democratic leanings.

cpi website launch 080908 toh kin woon "We have ideological principles in common, and if Gerakan was able to conceive a merger with MCA there is no reason why the same cannot be done with PKR," Toh told Malaysiakini prior to the launch of the Centre for Policy Initiatives (CPI)'s website in Kuala Lumpur.

The former Penang executive council member said Gerakan could alternatively opt to stand alone and continue its fight for a multi-cultural Malaysia as envisioned by the party's founding leaders in 1969.

Toh said he could no longer gauge with accuracy the likelihood of Gerakan leaving the BN nor could he tell how party grassroots actually felt about the matter since he had already left the party. However, he believed the majority of Gerakan members wanted to stay with BN.

"Although the clamour to leave BN is loud, the larger part of the party wants to remain inside," Toh said.

Toh added that although Gerakan had only two parliamentary seats, it could bring to the PKR and its Pakatan Rakyat alliance a wealth of administrative experience.

Gerakan has been a BN coalition member since 1972, and administered Penang for almost 39 years before its dismal showing in the March general election.

Although other party seniors like Tan Kee Kwong have left to join the PKR, Toh is keeping his options open.

But if his description of PKR deputy president Dr Syed Husin Ali as his 'guru' during the opening salutations to his speech is any indication to go by, then he could well end up in the PKR.

Repressive media laws

cpi website launch 080908 03 Meanwhile, director of the CPI Dr Lim Teck Ghee (photo: centre) said the website launched today was an excellent resource site for Malaysians wanting to be better informed about policies that affected them.

Available in both English and Mandarin, the website was a reservoir of well-researched public policies for the betterment of the nation, he added.

The site presently holds more than 400 policy papers on diverse areas like local elections, academic freedom and civil liberties - and all of it is free for the public. It also has a strong support base from bloggers and civil groups.

In addition there will be resident and guest columnist writing about various issues affecting Malaysians, amongst them Dr Azly Rahman and young bloggers like John Lee.

Syed Husin, a key-note speaker, said that Malaysia has an unenviable surfeit of laws repressing freedom of information - about 30. The most insidious of these was the Printing Presses and Publications Act which gives the home minister great powers to curtail the media, he added.

But thanks to the incursion of alternative media and blogs, much of the government's control of information has been reduced.

"Even party papers like Harakah and Suara Keadilan are outselling mainstream newspapers - especially Suara Keadilan which averages 180,000 copies."

Toh agreed with Syed Husin in that freedom of information was a pre-requisite for a democracy.

"Even when I was in state government, I was not given all the information I asked for from the federal government," Toh said.

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