

Delegates praise smooth leadership transition

KUALA LUMPUR: Various issues — from crime rate to its new Wawasan Open University — were raised by Gerakan delegates yesterday, but two subjects rang dominant.

Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik's stepping down next year as president and his successor Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon's incoming leadership were the favourite topics during the debates at the party's National Delegates' Conference, yesterday.

Most expressed their gratitude to their leader of 26 years, and thanked Dr Lim for ensuring a stable and peaceful party as well as a smooth leadership transition.

Delegate Ch'ng Boon Chye, from Pokok Sena, Kedah, said it was due to Dr Lim that the party had morphed from a small and modest political party into a successful and strong entity.

"We used to have our meetings in the back of cars or in small offices. Now, we have two big buildings and even a Wawasan Open University, which had been granted the licence to operate this year. We have so many tangible and intangible assets, thanks to the efforts of our president."

Delegates also voiced their support for Koh, and lashed out at those who had called for him to step down as Penang's Chief Minister.

Many took the opportunity to take a swipe at politicians who played the race card and fanned ethnic sentiments.

Pemuda representative Chua Chong Yong said this was particularly unacceptable in multiracial Malaysia, adding that these extremists should not be in politics.

Another delegate, Tan Tin Loon of Bera, Pahang, said if the post of Penang Chief Minister should be rotated, then the same should apply in other States.

"I feel the Chief Minister of Penang is the Chief Minister for all races, just like the Prime Minister says he is Prime Minister for everyone."

Tan said if anyone wished to be a hero, they should work towards eradicating poverty, reducing crime and realising the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

"The proposal that the position should be rotated had a hidden agenda (*ada udang di sebalik batu*)."

Ong Khang Woon of Tumpat, Kelantan, delivered a fiery speech on how Gerakan youth were being sidelined in the decision-making process.

"It's embarrassing. The Pemuda (wings) in other component parties are very active, but Gerakan Youth seems to be sleeping."

The failure of the Gerakan Youth, he said, was because of the "young YBs" (Yang Berhormat), whose positions and future were decided by the parent body.

"What have they (the young YBs) done for Gerakan Youth?"

Wanita representative Geeta Suresh of Bayan Baru, Penang, said politicians who wanted to be popular in a short time did not realise the consequences of their actions.

She also said that Bangsa Malaysia could only be achieved if there was a basic consensus and by respecting each other's religions and cultures.