

Keng Yaik: Gerakan will be in good hands

A week before the Gerakan National Delegates' Conference, Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik looks back on his 26 years as party president and tells **CHOW KUM HOR** about the final countdown.



Q: You will be attending the party's National Delegates' Conference for the last time next week. How does that feel?

A: There is no emotion. The party has been prepared for it since 1999 when I first voiced my intention, asking leaders to allow me to retire.

My successor (Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon) has already been identified and accepted by most of the party leadership.

One would think that the party leadership and grassroots wouldn't care whether I come or go, but that is not true because they are all prepared.

There may be some who want me to stay on. They compare me with Tsu Koon. I told them no.

I faced the same thing when I took over from (former president Tun Dr Lim) Chong Eu. They tried to compare me with Chong Eu.

My way and Chong Eu's way of

leading the party are different. My way and Tsu Koon's way will also be different.

As long we know the leader has the heart for the party, we are in safe hands. For better or worse, he is the right man and his heart is in the right place.

Q: How much faith do you have in Koh to continue the party's struggles?

A: I have faith in him. He doesn't play *puak* (partisan politics), and he didn't put his hands into the till in his 16 years as Chief Minister.

He's worked hard for the party, and is serious about his job. That is the main thing. Performance will come later.

Q: After your departure, there is a fear that Gerakan leaders will not be as forthright and bold, and will be afraid to make unpopular decisions. Are you worried?

A: The last paragraph of my opening speech (at the conference next week) will touch on that.

(Proceeds to take speech draft and reads): "As a political party, the present and future Gerakan leaders must be willing to make tough decisions and take unpopular action to adjust to the new political reality. I hope all leaders and members will rise up to this challenge."

A good leader is not a crowd pleaser or a populist. A good leader should not avoid making tough decisions and be afraid of con-

fronting people.

Q: You think your successor has such qualities?

A: He has his way. Chong Eu will never talk about things the way I do. I do not talk the way Tsu Koon does. I have my way of confronting issues.

He has his own way of doing the same which people assume as a sign of weakness.

Give him a chance to do it in his way, which is totally un-KY (Keng Yaik) like.

Q: How smooth will the transition be? There are fears of a power struggle after you leave.

A: There will be no power struggle. I am prepared to leave both party and Government posts.

But the party leadership thinks it is better for me to finish my term as minister. I have a heavy portfolio. There are things (in the ministry) that need another year or two for me to see through.

If I leave (my ministerial post), it will cause an artificial situation in the party. Tsu Koon will be obliged to do things which may not be good for the party — by putting the wrong people in the wrong position.

If you make a Penang man a minister, and should Tsu Koon come up (to the Federal level after the general election), that man (Tsu Koon put as minister) is almost promised to be the next chief minister.

Then, Tsu Koon is limiting his choice to 'existing Members of Parliament.

If a Perak man takes over as minister, he's not going to be a minister for two years and then demoted should Tsu Koon decide to come up.

Or in order to maintain his (the Perak leader's) ministership, Tsu Koon is forced to stay on as CM.

Then, he may not be able to manoeuvre to decide his role as party president. Why not let the next general election be the judge of that?

Q: In your opinion, who should be the next chief minister?

A: It has to depend on the situation of the day. Tsu Koon has to assess for himself the four see-

I will be available for consultation if needed, says KY

narios that happened to past presidents.

Syed Hussein Alatas was president without taring on any government or elected position. Chong Eu was chief minister of Penang.

During the first stage of my presidency, I was only an exco member for six years.

The remaining 20 years, I stayed on as president and minister.

Tsu Koon has four choices. He will have to make a decision depending on the situation. How do you know how things will be in two years' time?

Q: Why is the rotation of the chief minister's post a perennial issue? Umno keeps floating the idea every now and then.

A: Are they (some Umno leaders) unhappy because they are not getting things for themselves?

Or is it true that Tsu Koon went out of his way to marginalise the Malays in Penang?

All along, Umno has the most exco members in the State. Is it a reflection of Umno's power struggle in Penang?

Q: What are your plans during retirement?

A: In the inunediate term, I'll be concentrating on my ministry. I am also chairman of the Wawasan Open University and I will also concentrate on that.

Whether I'm given a party post or not, I'll still talk to party members on re-inventing Gerakan for the 21st century.

After I retire from the ministry, I'll be in the National Dialogue Institute (a centre to discuss "sensitive" issues).

I am always available for consultation, if the president wants me. You don't need a position to do this.

Q: Si Pin (Keng Yaik's son) has



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been a deputy Youth head for one year. How do you assess his performance?

A- I've got plenty of things to say which I leave it to myself. How can the president criticise the deputy Youth head, especially when he is his son?

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