

Gerakan seeks to preserve position

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PENANG: Penang may have been a Gerakan stronghold for the past few decades but recent developments indicate the party cannot afford to be complacent.

Perhaps the most telling sign is Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik's (*pic*) recent announcement that he will spend more time in Penang to strengthen the party after he retires as president, which is expected to take place in April.

— Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, currently the deputy president, is slated to take over as president.

It remains to be seen if he will move on to a federal government position after that, but Lim's post-retirement plan suggests that much needs to be done to preserve Gerakan's place in the state.

He plans to spend more time in Penang to help train the second echelon leaders to enhance the party's strength and position.

Gerakan secretary-general Datuk Seri Chia Kwang Chye admitted recently that support for BN among the electorate had dropped by 10%.

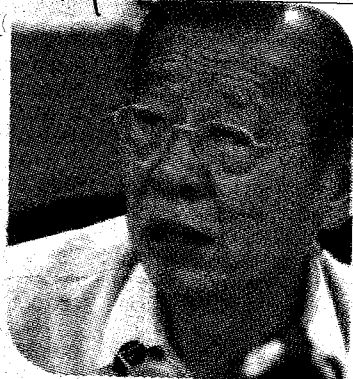
Opposition parties like Parti Keadilan Rakyat and the DAP intend to team up to take on the BN in Penang in the next general election.

But the challenge is not only from the Opposition, as there is also discontent from Barisan Nasional component parties.

Last year, Penang Umno members complained that Koh had neglected the plight of the Malays in the state.

Umno Tanjung division chairman Datuk Ahmad Ibni Hajar said that with Lim's vast knowledge and expertise, he can be a good mediator for Gerakan and other component parties in the state.

"Maybe he can help the current Gerakan leaders here to see more clearly the plight of the Malays in the state, as we still feel that more can be done by the state government to help us to be more competitive," he said.



State MCA deputy chairman Lau Chick Tuan said he did not think Lim's plan stemmed from the concern that support for the party's was weakening, but from a sense of responsibility to continue to contribute even after he was no longer in power.

"It should be good for all BN component parties in Penang and I do not think his presence here will face objections from anybody," he said.

Penang People's Progressive Party chairman, Datuk Dr Loga Bala Mohan, said it was timely as many people felt the existing leadership in the state was complacent and this had caused uneasiness among the grassroots.

"He is a good leader. He knows how to solve the teething problems within the party and problems with other component parties in the state," he said.

"I believe he is more like our former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, as he can provide valuable contributions not just to the party and state, but also to the country."

State Gerakan leaders welcome Lim's plan to help groom young leaders.

"It is an on-going process for all of us to groom our second echelon leaders and his presence is logical, especially with the establishment of the Wawasan Open University here," Chia said.

"This gives us more reason to concentrate our strength in Penang."

Among those in the running for the chief minister's post include Chia, health department parliamentary secretary Datuk Lee Kah Choon and state executive councillor Datuk Dr Teng Hock Nan, while another name being bandied about is Teng Chang Yeow.