

**With Penang in mind, move to unseat Tsu Koon gathers pace**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**August 14, 2011**  
**By Jahabar Sadiq**

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 14 — Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon is going to get taste of what Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud got in the run-up to polls in the east Malaysian state — the constant drumbeat of politicians and the media asking him to retire from politics.

The view in Putrajaya is that the mild-mannered Gerakan chief should step down as head of the Barisan Nasional (BN) component party before the coming general elections if the coalition is to have any chance of wresting back Penang from Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

While Tsu Koon (picture) has not been dogged by allegations of corruption and abuse of power as Taib Mahmud, he is viewed as indecisive and a symbol of the BN leadership which was rejected by the voters in 2008.

BN chairman and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has spoken behind closed doors on the need to rejuvenate the Gerakan leadership with younger talent and acknowledges that BN component parties need new talent if inroads are to be made in Penang, where DAP's Lim Guan Eng is a formidable opponent.

In its latest issue dated August 13, international weekly The Economist dubbed Penang "the first custom-made city of globalisation" and credited Lim for boosting the port city's revival by axing a racial special treatment economic policy in the state to create a more level-playing field that appeals to foreign investors.

"He has become the first governor in Malaysia to open up all state tenders to competition. This has entailed dismantling the special preferences for ethnic Malays that have underpinned the BN's rule since the early 1970s," the influential magazine on business and international affairs said of the Penang chief minister and his economic reforms.

"Adapted to the national stage, such policies could transform the way that the Malaysian federal government conducts business," it added.

The international praise for Lim is seen as an indictment of Tsu Koon's rule of the island state, which began prospering under his mentor, the late Tun Lim Chong Eu, before the Princeton graduate took over as chief minister from 1990 to 2008.

In what is likely to be a recurring theme, Umno-owned Mingguan Malaysia urged Tsu Koon today to consider his position as chief of Gerakan, with the paper's Awang Selamat saying that the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department was only concerned with publicity and appearing in photographs with national leader.

The commentator said that his ministerial position appeared to be wasted on him because he had not used the profile to galvanise Gerakan in Penang or chart a plan to regain the state.

Still, using the media to push out a seasoned politician is a strategy fraught with minefields. In the run-up to Sarawak elections, Najib tried to nudge a politically liable Taib by getting

him to say that he would not lead the state for the full term.

The mainstream newspaper also kept on harping about how the strongman would quit in two years. Even the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) which does not comment on ongoing investigations said that the Sarawak CM was under probe, a move which suggested that Putrajaya was telling Taib that it was in his best interest to leave the scene.

These moves to push Taib appear to have backfired badly. Given that he led his party to a strong showing in the Sarawak polls and his realisation that Najib and other Umno leaders need him more than he needs them, there is now an admission in Putrajaya that Taib will have to set his own retirement timetable.

He attended the BN retreat last Wednesday but attendees said that he was very quiet and did not contribute much to the discussion.

A senior government official told The Malaysian Insider: "His relationship with the PM is not great because he felt that he was made a scapegoat for the Sarawak elections and is upset that the MACC was also used by his own government to malign him," said the official.

Najib will likely have to patch up ties with Taib Mahmud given that there are 31 parliamentary seats up for grabs in Sarawak, the country's largest state and seen as a "fixed deposit" by BN.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2011 The Malaysian Insider

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/with-penang-in-mind-move-to-unseat-tsu-koon-gathers-pace/>