

## **Teng, Wong To Go For SUPP Presidency?**

**Bernama**

**September 2, 2011**

**By Alan Ting**

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 2 (Bernama) -- The revival of a rivalry between senior leaders for the party presidency may dominate the Sarawak United People Party's (SUPP) triennial delegates' conference (TDC) in December.

When current president Tan Sri Dr George Chan Hong Nam decided to step down last April, following a state election in which SUPP fared badly, he called for the party old guard to follow him, thus paving the way for younger blood to take over.

Dr Chan and party secretary-general Datuk Sim Kheng Hui, who also resigned, were asked to stay on until the TDC.

Now, with the conference growing closer, not many who have toiled for the party and waited patiently for their time in the spotlight are prepared to quit.

Talk in the party inner circle is that current deputy secretary-general Datuk Seri Wong Soon Koh and party treasurer-general David Teng Lung Chi are both eyeing the presidency.

Both are said to command substantial support.

Wong is said to be backed by most of the party members from central and northern regions, except Sarikei, where Teng is based.

Teng, former state assemblyman for Repok, is said to enjoy support from most party members in Kuching, and from those who oppose Wong and Dr Chan.

"Dr Chan is dead against Teng's bid," said a Teng supporter. "He wants Teng to quit the party along with the other old guards."

Party insiders said that Teng, after being overlooked and sidelined for more than 28 years, is ready to go for broke.

Many of the party grassroots are supportive of Teng's plans to seek the number-one post, as they feel that the party has been unfair to him.

A leader from Sarikei pointed out that Teng has been overlooked for a full ministership and other top party posts since 1983.

Now, said the party leader, some 28 branches have thrown their support behind Teng, as have more than 50 per cent of the 123 members of the party's central committee (CC), whose call for a special delegates conference to solve the current leadership crisis in the party was thwarted by Dr Chan.

Teng remains evasive on his political plans. "It's just media speculation," he said. "Party members are entitled to have their opinions and choice of leadership."

However, this has not stopped some party members from initiating a campaign on Teng's behalf, stressing that Dr Chan should be held solely responsible for the party's dismal

performance in the state polls last April.

In that election, SUPP lost 13 of its 19 seats, with only two SUPP Chinese leaders -- Wong Soon Koh (Bawang Assan) and Lee Kim Shin (Senadin) -- retaining power. The four other seats were won by SUPP's Dayak candidates.

Should Teng decide to go for the presidency, observers believe he will face Dr Chan's favoured successor, Wong.

Dr Chan is said to be backing Wong as not only the best person to lead the party, but also as the best to represent the Chinese community in the state government.

One political analyst said that Wong, if elected, could rely on the support of the four elected Dayak leaders -- Francis Harden (Sri Aman), Johnichal Rayong (Engkilili), Jerip Susil (Bengoh) and Ranom Mina (Opar) -- as well as the member of parliament (MP) for Serian, Datuk Richard Riot.

But whether SUPP divisional delegates will vote for Wong is a big question mark.

A party insider revealed that support for Wong is strong in Sibu, Miri, Bintulu and Limbang. But Sarikei, Bintangor, Kuching, Simanggang, Engkilili and other smaller towns are in favour of Teng, he said.

The party observer pointed out that disagreements between Teng and Dr Chan began in 2006, after the latter failed to handle problems in the party. Specifically, criticism was strong for his handling the Dudong branch formation.

Related problems still drag on. Failure to resolve them was among reasons cited for the loss of the Sibu parliamentary seat in a May 2010 by-election.

The same issues were cited following SUPP's devastating defeat in the April state election this year, when the party dropped incumbent Datuk Dr Soon Choon Teck as the candidate for the Dudong state seat.

SUPP replaced him with Datuk Tiong Thai King, Lanang MP and chairman of Sibu Municipal Council. Tiong was then narrowly defeated (by a 317-vote margin) by DAP rookie Yap Hoi Liong.

SUPP leaders such as Jonathan Krai, an influential member of the Engkilili branch, believes that only someone like Teng can pull the party together.

"It's high time that Teng be elected to restore unity and dignity to the party," Krai said.

Many political analysts believe that should a Wong-Teng match up occur, Wong will have a difficult fight against Teng's reputation as a grassroots hero.

--BERNAMA

Copyright © 2011 BERNAMA

Source: <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newspolitic.php?id=611199>