

Gerakan to name new Penang boss today as polls loom

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By Jahabar Sadiq

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 17 — Gerakan is to name either party secretary-general Teng Chang Yeow or Penang vice-chief Ong Thean Lye to head the state chapter and recapture its one-time political fortress from DAP in the next general election, sources say.

The Malaysian Insider understands that Gerakan president Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon is to announce his successor for the state chairmanship after pressure from party members who feel the former Penang chief minister is not suitable compared to previous leaders such as the late Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu or Tun Dr Lim Keng Yaik.

“Teng Chang Yeow has the upper hand but Dr Koh (picture) might choose Ong Thean Lye, who is also his political secretary,” a source told The Malaysian Insider about the choice for the Penang leadership which will be announced this morning.

Another source confirmed that Koh’s scheduled announcement was related to the Penang leadership as the state party chief will also lead the state Barisan Nasional (BN) which was routed in the state in Election 2008. Gerakan lost all 13 state seats it held, leaving only Umno to hold on to 11 seats in the 40-seat state assembly.

“Dr Koh will talk about Penang, that’s for sure. As for his future, no one knows for sure as he’s keeping his cards close to his chest,” the source said.

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

While Koh has not been dogged by allegations of corruption and abuse of power as other politicians, 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.

Najib said three days ago that he will not call elections this year but met with several BN component leaders on Tuesday night for a discussion. He denied that it was related to the coming polls.

Koh, who has helmed the party since 2008, has been constantly criticised for his leadership which many deem as “weak and soft” and is also under immense pressure from party members to come up with a firm decision on his position in the party.

Dissenting voices grew even stronger at the party’s 40th national delegates conference in mid-October, which prompted the minister in the Prime Minister’s Department to announce to the delegates at the end of the conference that he was “willing to sacrifice himself for the party”.

Asked further on his sacrifice statement, the senator told reporters to be patient, saying: "I don't want to talk about sacrifice, everybody sacrifices in politics."

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