

Najib finally names Chang Yeow as Penang BN chief
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 22 — Gerakan secretary-general Teng Chang Yeow has been made Penang Barisan Nasional (BN) chief effective immediately, Datuk Seri Najib Razak said today, confirming The Malaysian Insider's report last November that Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon would be replaced ahead of the next general elections.

The appointment today culminates behind-the-scene moves by the BN chairman to get Chang Yeow to lead the coalition against Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng's government instead of state Gerakan chief Datuk Dr Teng Hock Nan, who lost the chance to lead the state when BN lost it in Election 2008.

Chang Yeow is expected to increase attacks on the popular Lim in the hope that it will keep the opposition leader firmly rooted in Penang during the polls campaign, expected as early as this June.

The prime minister also had to spend the last few months persuading Penang Umno to accept Chang Yeow over Hock Nan. Both state leaders are not related to each other.

Koh had denied last November and January this year that he would be replaced as state BN chief. saying the ruling coalition's top council had yet to discuss the issue.

The Malaysian Insider had reported then that BN will name Chang Yeow as its new state chief while Hock Nan will remain Penang Gerakan chairman as part of a move to recapture the island state from Pakatan Rakyat (PR). It is also understood that Gerakan could get more state seats at the expense of coalition partner MCA although both parties lost all their seats in Election 2008.

Chang Yeow was a three-term state assemblyman for Padang Kota between 1995 and 2008 when he lost the seat and the state BN government fell. He was a state executive councillor between 2004 and 2008.

Hock Nan has been Gerakan Penang chief since 2008 and has been a party vice-president since 2005. He has also spent three terms as an assemblyman and was slotted to be a potential chief minister if Gerakan kept the state government in Election 2008.

Koh, who recently renewed his term as a senator, had announced that he will not take part in coming general election after BN-linked media spoke about the need for changes in the multi-racial party. It is understood that the view in Putrajaya is that the mild-mannered Gerakan chief should step down as head of the BN component party before the general election if the coalition is to have any chance of wresting back Penang from 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.

Najib 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 secretary-general Guan Eng is a formidable opponent.

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".

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