

Keen Contest For The Gerakan Presidency?

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By Alan Ting

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 14 (Bernama) -- The Gerakan Delegates Conference on Oct 26-27 is likely to witness a keen contest for the party's top post with several candidates indicating their interest and soliciting support from the party members and delegates.

Leading the potential list are party acting president and current deputy president Datuk Chang Ko Youn, who is expected to go for the party's top post along with acting secretary-general Datuk Mah Siew Keong who is also party vice-president, Penang Gerakan chief Datuk Teng Chang Yeow and former secretary-general Datuk Seri Chia Kwang Chye.

For the deputy president's post, the potential contenders include Kedah Gerakan state chairman Dr Cheah Soon Hai, newly elected Federal Territory chairman Law Hooi Keong, Youth chief Datuk Lim Si Pin and Simpang Renggam member of Parliament Liang Teck Ming.

"These are the names being mentioned and some of them have been going around either to seek support or getting the feedback from the grassroots," said Gerakan Negeri Sembilan Chief David Choong Vee Hing.

He pointed out that this is a good development for the party as it indicated that there were many leaders who still believed in the party's struggle and were ready to offer themselves to lead the party, especially when looking at the current challenging political environment.

NEW LEADERS

"The party needs new leaders, including the young ones with proven record in the effort to boost the people's support for the party. Of the names that are being mentioned, some of them are promising young leaders while some are experienced," he added.

However, not all of the aspirants being mentioned would eventually go for the top post as some may settle for other positions like vice-president after they evaluate their chances and not to mention the backdoor horse trading to boost their chances.

"It depends on the negotiation. If they come to some sort of consensus, then it might be a straight contest or even no contest. All this will become clearer once nomination on Oct 19 nears," a party insider told Bernama.

POTENTIAL CONTENDERS

The general consensus among political observers is that though all the four potential contenders including the current acting president have their respective strengths, only Teng and Mah are seen as serious contenders.

"Teng is known to be outspoken but the general feeling is that, he should concentrate on Penang, and not to be burdened by national politics as Penang deserved special attention and a leader like him have to match Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng. While Mah was the elected VP (vice-president) with highest votes and currently also acting secretary-general.

"The other potential candidates are Chia, who has been keeping a low profile for many years but still active on the ground while the current acting president Chang has a head start due to the fact he is the acting party chief. However, question remains will both run for the presidency?," asked the party insider.

CHOICE OF THE GRASSROOTS

Teng seems to be the favourite but the grassroots leaders are divided with one group preferring the newly elected Penang Gerakan chairman to focus on Penang by going for a lesser position at national level.

They argued this was what exactly done by the late Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu when he became the Penang chief minister and allowed Tun Dr Lim Keng Yaik to be the party president.

They argued that the same was initially done by Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon when he was the chief minister, where he only held the vice-president's post before taking up a more prominent position as deputy president.

"After he took up the position as deputy president, we could see less focus on the state. Every Gerakan leader has to realise that Penang has always been a special responsibility for anyone heading the party in the state," argued a division leader from Penang who did not wish to be named.

MORE WEIGHT FOR TENG

However, Gerakan youth deputy chief Oh Tong Keong felt otherwise and said with Teng contesting the party top post, it would give more weight for this aggressive politician to match Guan Eng, DAP's secretary-general.

"I also agree with the contention that he should focus on Penang. However, by taking up the president's post, it would give him more power to take on Guan Eng who is not just Penang chief minister but also the man who holds the most powerful position in DAP," he argued.

Founded in 1968, Gerakan took a beating in the 13th General Election with the party ending up with only one parliamentary and three state seats. In 2008, Penang fell to the DAP after 39 years under Gerakan.

"You have to remember, Gerakan is the only party which allows election at various level from the branch, division, state and national leadership. In the recently concluded election for state leadership, we see many new chairmen and new leaders at various level.

"This is good in helping the party move forward, we need this new and young blood in the party," said former Gerakan Selangor chairman Datuk Lum Weng Keong.

He said the combination of young and experienced leaders in the party will be ideal as it would at least give a chance for the party to change it's image from a status quo oriented party to a dynamic one.

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