

**Growing pains in DAP, as the young replace the old**  
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**BY JENNIFER GOMEZ**

The DAP's electoral successes in the last two general elections have brought in a wave of younger professionals who are now driving the party, much to the chagrin of older members who are just about to taste the fruits of their long struggle for success.

The tension between the old members and the professionals has led to two DAP assemblymen resigning from their political posts in the Malacca state assembly while another in Sabah quit the party last month.

The leadership of Datuk Ngeh Koo Ham and his cousin, Nga Kor Ming, in Perak DAP is back in the spotlight after a moratorium in the run-up to the May 5 polls, while in Kedah, Bukit Bendera MP Zairil Khir Johari's (pic) appointment as interim state chairman has led to party veteran and Johor chief Dr Boo Cheng Hau raising a storm.

Political analyst Khoo Kay Peng said the spate of issues showed the DAP was in a quandary – how to deal with the gap between the expectations of the grassroots and the effect of the young professionals on the party's leadership?

Khoo said the DAP had become more urban, elite and appeared to be moving away from its working class base.

"When I say elite, I mean more educated and professional. If DAP wants to defend its urban turf made up of the middle class, they will continue to field professionals, those with good qualifications," he explained, adding this was where the conflict arose.

Khoo said that in the 1960s, DAP was a party of the grassroots, where it championed the rights of hawkers, blue-collar workers and trade unions.

Over the last two general elections, however, this has changed and DAP, which at one time used to contest up to 80 parliamentary seats, only contested in 51 seats, readily giving up the rural and semi-rural seats to be contested by their partners in Pakatan Rakyat.

Khoo also put this down to the Lim Guan Eng factor, who preferred to field young professionals, but who are not necessarily from the grassroots.

As such, senior members who held up the party in the past were feeling sidelined and were coming out to express their unhappiness.

"This is not just unhappiness over one or two issues. They are simply not happy that they are sidelined.

"They are concerned the party is not focussing, not prioritising and not recognising them, and instead those without experience and who have not been long in the party were given seats to contest in the recent polls," he added.

According to Khoo, the resentment among certain seniors was that the likes of Dr Ong Kian Ming (pic), MP for Serdang, and Yeo Bee Yin, state assemblyperson for Damansara Utama, were chosen as candidates for GE13 although they had not been long in the party.

Dr Ong, when asked to comment on this, countered that DAP needed "people of all ages to come together for renewal".

"In any party, when new faces are introduced, there are bound to be reservations by senior leaders.

"But as long as elected representatives, especially the younger ones, are able to perform and prove their worthiness, the bulk of these reservations will go away," he added.

Still, Khoo said the current complaints by party seniors and leaders coming out of the woodwork was a sign that DAP was poised for an identity change.

"If the old and new cannot find middle ground and unite, DAP will turn into a party for the elite. And the direction of the party will be determined by the wisdom of the party leadership," he offered.

DAP national chairman Karpal Singh, however, was not happy that party seniors were airing their grievances in the open, saying that they were damaging the good image of the party in the eyes of the public.

"There are internal channels, they can always come to us, we are ready to listen," he said.

Karpal also said that having been given a big mandate from the people in GE13, where DAP won 38 of the 51 parliament seats it contested, the public would not appreciate the open squabbles within DAP.

Zairil echoed the views of his party chairman, saying that there was no need for state leaders to air dirty linen in public.

He said in any party, there was bound to be unhappiness over the selection of candidates for a general election.

When asked if the dissent could be sparked by external sources, Zairil said that while the possibility cannot be ruled out, it would not hold true for all the recent cases of dissent voiced.

Zairil himself found the national party leaders pragmatic and said what was needed was for all factions to sit down and talk when problems arose.

"Bring it up internally, I'm sure it can be solved," Zairil said. - October 11, 2013.

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