

Keep cool head, civil tongue, politicians told

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KUALA LUMPUR: Criticism by politicians, especially youngsters ones, should be made with "cool heads", in a constructive light and without instigating racist sentiments.

Gerakan deputy president Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon, who said this yesterday, felt that criticism in politics was good and encouraged improvements if it was focused on real issues.

In light of the current "hot season", delegates should not make their debates personal or base them on emotions as they would then be distracted from the real issues concerning the nation, he added.

"I hope that all working within the Barisan Nasional understand that we must use internal channels (to voice criticism).

"In the BN, we do talk and even quarrel inside, and sometimes we do raise our voices or bang tables, but we do it internally.

"Let us not be seen as quarrelling outside... and squabbling over one position or post, or the public will get fed up with us. We are not like that, we have a long tradition of defending the people," he said when opening the party's Youth and Wanita wings' national delegates' conferences here.

Earlier, Youth chief Datuk Mah Siew Keong denounced recent criticism against Koh, Penang Chief Minister, as "rude, unbecoming of leaders and against the spirit of the BN".

On Monday, Bukit Mertajam Umno division chief Senator Datuk Musa



■ Reports by Chow Kum Hor, Koh Lay Chin and Eileen Ng from the 19th Gerakan Youth and Wanita national delegates conferences

Sheikh Fadzir had demanded that Koh relinquish his position as Penang Water Supply Corporation chairman, alleging that there existed favouritism in the management of the corporation.

Koh said Gerakan delegates could raise public complaints, but in a positive way and without lumping certain issues as a particular community's problem.

He also said there was a proper way to respond to attacks, and if criticism was made with good intentions, then politicians should take heed.

"But if there are bad intentions, then we cannot ignore them as the public could misunderstand. If that happens, then we criticise the individual and not the party, and we must respond accurately, without allowing it to spread between parties," he said.

He also said if Gerakan members were unhappy with any particular attack made against them, then they should respond in an appropriate manner.

"Don't respond in a way that you would not like to hear from your critics."

At a Press conference later, Koh said the issue of having a rotation system for the Penang Chief Minister's post should not be raised any more as it had been answered by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Abdullah had said there would be no changes in the current system for now.

"We want to talk about national and international issues... and I don't know why this continues to be a topic of interest," Koh said.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, who also attended the opening ceremony and was present at the Press Conference, said the matter was not a problem for Umno Youth as its members could raise any concerns through discussions using proper channels.

He advised young leaders from all parties not to make populist statements based on communal sentiments for short-term gain, as the people would remember what they stood for.

"Those looking to become leaders in future should remember that they will have to answer if they take the populist approach now and play it up for one race. They will not go very far under the BN concept," he said.