

Analysts: Gerakan only option to land Chinese votes for Perikatan but will only work with right candidates

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Gerakan president Datuk Dominic Lau had said that the party's focus is to get back to winning formula in Penang after he received a letter of acceptance on the party joining PN by coalition chairman and Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on February 11. — Picture by Pern Kuan Keong

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 15 — The acceptance of Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan) — a multiracial party into Perikatan Nasional (PN) would help both sides face the 15th General Election (GE15) which many have predicted will happen later this year, political observers said.

Most political analysts said this will prove to be an advantage for PN to be in the best position to face GE15 as they currently lack multiracial support if Barisan Nasional (BN) and Umno decides to go against the coalition.

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) Geostrategist Prof Azmi Hassan said it is also the best move for Gerakan due to its inability to be independent as a political party.

He said the merger will be beneficial to both sides as PN in peninsular Malaysia only has Bersatu and PAS — two Malay parties that are based largely on Malay majority semi-urban and rural seats as its component parties.

“Basically it’s a mutual benefit for both Gerakan and Perikatan Nasional. For the time being, Gerakan working solo or without any coalition is a disadvantage to them.

"And also Perikatan Nasional needs more friendly allies in this case because currently when we mention Perikatan Nasional in peninsular Malaysia, it's a Malay based party. So it is a mutual benefit," he told *Malay Mail*.

Azmi said PN is trying to emulate Umno who had the multiracial coalition of BN that can receive more acceptance in the next general election.

"By accepting Gerakan in Perikatan Nasional, it can be said that the coalition is trying to emulate Umno. I think that's the reason why they accepted Gerakan in this case.

"So we can see the direction PN is going on right now, where if we can look at Perikatan Nasional logo is very very similar to Barisan Nasional. So by accepting Gerakan, Perikatan Nasional is trying to portray that they are a multi-racial coalition in terms of peninsula itself," he said.

Meanwhile, deputy director at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's (UKM) Institute of Ethnic Studies, Assoc Prof Kartini Aboo Talib Khalid said it was time for Gerakan to start grasping the Chinese votes.

She said the party clearly lagged behind DAP who is part of Pakatan Harapan (PH) and MCA who is a part BN.

"I think Gerakan needs the alliance to allow itself to justify its existence. It is not a secret that the Chinese prefer DAP more than any other Chinese parties (MCA or Gerakan)," she said.

Kartini added that the move to leave BN in the last general election was a mistake as the party failed to grow on its own.

"Gerakan's decision to withdraw from BN in 2018 was a wrong move after all. Gerakan lost hope after GE14, did not win any seat, and quickly gave up to the fate that Gerakan needed a more robust alliance than BN," she said.

Gerakan president Datuk Dominic Lau had said that the party's focus is to get back to winning formula in Penang after he received a letter of acceptance on the party joining PN by coalition chairman and Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on February 11.

Political analyst Lee Kuok Tiung from Universiti Malaysia Sabah said Gerakan would likely be given a significant role in Penang — where the chief minister was from the party from 1969 to 2008 before DAP took over.

"Gerakan when it was part of BN only gets one or two (Parliament) seats. They played a significant role in Penang previously whereby the CM is also from Gerakan.

"But that's due to the understanding between BN component parties too," he said.

Lee however said Gerakan needed good candidates to go against DAP in order to regain back the state.

To date, Gerakan has yet to win any seat in the last three general elections when they lost in 2008.

"Gerakan needs good candidates to go against DAP," Lee said when asked if Gerakan has what it takes to go against DAP in the next general election.

Azmi also agreed that Penang seats are currently the most relevant to be contested by Gerakan as other components such as Bersatu and PAS are less likely to be interested in the state's seats.

"The seats for allocated for Gerakan will probably be in Penang, where Bersatu or PAS has a very little chance of winning," he said.

Meanwhile, Kartini said PN has no choice but to allow Gerakan to contest in Chinese majority seats.

"Well, the room for negotiation is still wide open. Eventually, they will have to allocate seats to represent the Chinese. The British designed the consociation to allow a mixed representation of the government.

"So far, it has been the formula to form a government in Malaysia," she said.