

GERAKAN matters!

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PARTY

Inaugural Issue



Forward Together *with* **One Heart**

Vision

To be the party of choice for all Malaysians

Mission

To build a united, democratic, just, egalitarian, liberal and progressive nation for all Malaysians, transcending the barriers of race and religion

Three Thrusts

- 1** To voice Gerakan's ideology, policy position and advocate a Malaysian solution for various major issues
 - 2** To rebuild, rebrand and re-empower the party at all levels to effectively serve and represent all Malaysians
 - 3** To win the people's hearts and minds and to regain the people's mandate
-

Eight Main Strategies

- 1** To formulate and voice principled policy positions and solutions for major national issues
- 2** To be constructive opposition in PR-led states and to reform BN
- 3** To effectively rebuild and revitalise the party
- 4** To forge smart partnership with society and non-governmental organisations
- 5** To embark on membership expansion and consolidation
- 6** To train more leaders and boost their commitment
- 7** To re-energise and revamp the party at all levels
- 8** To further improve communication and public relations strategies

Why Gerakan Matters!

Some people said Gerakan has become irrelevant after the March 8 general election, which left the party with only two parliament and four state seats. Others said Gerakan is just another mosquito party.

However, there are also those who think Gerakan still can play an influential role in Malaysian politics. Although the party is weaker now, it is still relevant because the party remains committed to multiracialism and has a respectable track record, especially in Penang.

Hence, Gerakan Matters!

Like most young people of our generation, we are not big fans of the Barisan Nasional.

Although the ruling coalition has contributed to political stability and prosperity of the country, it also failed to stem racial discrimination, corruption and environmental degradation.

While Gerakan can pride itself as a multiracial party, the people view it as an accomplice in a coalition that causes so much social ills in the country. What worse is BN, especially Umno, does not seem to learn from the March 8 political tsunami.

Therefore, many from within the party and the general public are calling for Gerakan to withdraw from BN.

But, Gerakan seems to be stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea.

It cannot stay put in BN if Umno does not reform and it cannot join Pakatan Rakyat either because it does not have the bargaining power now.

On the other hand, it cannot simply withdraw from BN and become a “third force” since the “first-past-the-post” system does not favour a third party.

In this issue of Gerakan Matters, we try to search for a “blue ocean” for Gerakan while our contributor Fazil Irwan explores whether Gerakan can still play a role within BN.

We also analyse Gerakan's chances as a third party and interviewed a real party insider on what happened to Gerakan in Penang.

Due to time constraints, we are not able to produce more articles and analyses this time. We hope to improve on our contents in the future and appreciate any comments from our readers.

Please send your feedback to sedared@gmail.com

Happy Reading!

Regards,

Kevin & Yeen Seen

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Engaging the majority towards multiracialism

By **FAZIL IRWAN**

Racial politics is still alive because the mindset of the majority has not change much

The debate between Koh Tsu Koon and Lim Guan Eng on live TV at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka on the 20th August 2008 was an important event that gave an indication that Gerakan still has a stake to play in Malaysia's new political landscape.

In the course of the debate, Koh managed to prove that his political party still stands for transparency, effectiveness and egalitarian principles - immutable principles that were pivotal in the formation of the party on the 25th May 1968.

The overall media perception of the debate thus was heavily inclined towards Koh, who was perceived as a person of integrity and was an instrumental figure in developing Penang into what it is today.

In the context of a Malaysia that is moving ever quickly towards a new paradigm of non-racial politics, the event that Wednesday was a strong indication that Gerakan's existence as a multiracial party within a largely racial make-up of coalition parties was still very important. Here's why.

RACE-BASED VS MULTIRACIALISM

I guess we are all starting to come to terms with the idea that Malaysia, if it is to survive as a multiracial nation and compete effectively in the global marketplace, needs to transcend the racial ballgame. Yet, we are faced with 2 huge obstacles: our political system is predominantly based on race-based parties and about 60% of the population is very much entrenched in that racial make-up.

These two factors combined, makes it difficult for a sweeping change of the political system overnight. How do these two factors translate into Malaysia's existing political landscape?

The algebra is simple. We have on one hand of the political spectrum, a motley group of political parties each having quite different, if not confrontational, political outlooks. What brings them together however is their opposition towards the seeming excesses of UMNO and in different ways, the struggle for a non-race based political system.

On the other side of the fence, we have a relatively unified group of predominantly race-based parties, which despite suffering

huge losses in the last elections, still commands a huge support base among the grassroots, in particular the Malays which make up more than 60% of the population.

Now let us look at this situation more carefully. If the last election was to tell us something, it is that Malaysians are ready to embrace non-racial politics. Wrong.

An increasing number of them are, but a huge chunk of the population, the Malays in particular are still stuck in the racial political make-up. And they certainly won't change overnight, especially if most of the people who are fighting for non-racial politics are calling for the eradication of the privileges accorded to them.

On a sunny day, this would just spell a political impasse. Nothing would change because both sides of the fence are speaking two distinct political languages. At worst, this might culminate into a racial bloodbath, a 1969 repeat, because the pressure on the Malays to relinquish their privileges will be far greater, especially with an increasingly demanding opposing side (mind you, this is an almost identical situation to the events preceding the 1969 riot).

MUSLIMS VS NON-MUSLIMS

I was disturbed by the recent PAS warning to their fellow PR counterparts that they would abandon the coalition if the rights of Muslims are jeopardised and if there are more non-Muslims than Muslims in the ruling regime, should they make it into government.

The fact is Muslims are almost always Malays in this country and we know what that PAS warning entail. Thus my greatest fear lies in the prospect that these elements in PAS would bring them to forge collaboration with similar elements in UMNO on racial and religious grounds, against the opposing forces bent at abolishing the special rights of people under their mandate.

This is a real concern. Malaysia cannot afford to be in that situation again.

Let us take stock of the situation. How possible is it then, in strict statistical terms, that a group of parties vying to abolish racial privileges be able to engage effectively with about 60%

Gerakan's role is to bridge the differences between those who are ready to embrace multiracialism and those who are not

of the population who will stand to lose these privileges? Slim. In fact, what worse is that the Malays will erect even higher defensive barriers against any encroachment to their privileges.

Their barriers are not without justification considering that a great number of them are still left far behind in the economic pecking order. Their incapability of getting out of that situation in due time and insecurity are major reasons for this high barrier. A belligerent call to end their privileges at this critical time is not helping either.

THE ROLE OF GERAKAN

It is within this specific context that Gerakan's importance as the multiracial conscience of the Barisan Nasional side of the fence can be appreciated. By being close to the 60% majority, Gerakan wields immense advantage as a conduit between the two divergent political worlds and is capable of bridging the "understanding" gap between those who understands the benefits of a non-race based political system and those who have not come to terms with it. Thus if any breakthrough in multiracialism is to happen in Malaysia, Gerakan will have to be part of it.

The reason why they failed in the past to effect these changes was because they were a peripheral figure in the emotive world of racial politics in Barisan Nasional. They were seen as timid and subordinate partners in the BN make up because of their lack of courage to stand up against excessive racial politics perpetrated by certain quarters of their more influential coalition counterparts.

In that sense, Dr Neil Khor and Khoo Kay Peng's conclusion in their book on non-sectarian politics in Malaysia about Gerakan being weak in the ruling coalition, does hold true. It is absolutely true that Gerakan's significance have been substantially eroded since it joined the Barisan Nasional.

But it is not joining the Barisan Nasional that is the problem. Rather it is the inability of the party as a whole to live up to its multiracial mission and to impress upon its counterparts the urgency of such a mission.

For starters, Gerakan is like any other Chinese party. Like MCA, and even DAP, its members are predominantly Chinese

who do have communal mindsets themselves. No significant effort has been made to bridge the gap into the Malay heartland and the culture and outlook of the party is still too Chinese centric. As a result, the party naturally succumbs into the racial make-up, sharing the piece of pie with MCA in vying for the Chinese electorates.

This is wrong and totally out of order. The branding of Gerakan as another Chinese party has to stop. In fact, it should be Gerakan's first objective to find ways and means to attract the hearts and minds of the other races into the party.

This has to be done not by lip service but by going down to the ground to learn and establish rapport with Indian and Malay communities to understand their needs and wants, and political aspirations for Malaysia.

ATTRACTING MALAYS AND INDIANS

Gerakan should attract Malay and Indian liberals who want a fresh change from the communal political outlook espoused by its other racial counterparts. This is Gerakan's target market. Strategies and action plans need to be worked out to get them into the Gerakan fold. Therefore, if Gerakan is to stand up again, it needs to be braver and more confident.

Make its stance known in the press and respond regularly on issues that compromise national unity and racial harmony. Make itself known as the bastion of multiracialism in Malaysia. There is nothing to lose now after what it has lost during the March elections.

Gerakan should bet all its chips on the game. Win with pride or die with honour. There should be no room for indifference. In any case, its importance in the overall scheme of things cannot be questioned. Malaysia needs Gerakan for it to move forward to the next level of a multiracial society.

Only when both sides of the fence speak the same language of multiracialism can there be real movement towards that direction. Gerakan is closer than any other multiracial party to the 60% majority population. That is an answer in itself.

Fazil Irwan is a director in an international foundation.

His views are his own and does not represent the stand of his organisation in any way.

The Future of **Gerakan**: Searching for a Blue Ocean

By **KEVIN TAN**

**Gerakan is like an undervalued stock.
It can rise again with the right strategies**

Some political scientists said politicians are “political entrepreneurs” who sell policies while political parties are their “companies”. If we look at a political party like a company, then we must accept that a political party need votes as much as a company needs sales.

A political party that cannot win elections is like a company that cannot make money. Sooner or later, its share price will collapse and shareholders will abandon the company. In this situation, the company will have to close shop or be taken over by another company.

Like a company fighting to survive in a competitive environment, a political party has to upgrade its policy solutions and programmes and marketing as well as outreach strategies. It also need to recruit good managers and talented workers.

EROSION OF GERAKAN'S MARKET SHARE

In the aftermath of the March 8 political tsunami, some “shareholders” of Gerakan have been calling for a change in party strategies. Due to a big erosion of market share, especially among Chinese and Indian voters in urban and semi-urban areas, Gerakan’s profit (in terms of representation) has plummeted by 80% at the national level and 90% at the state level.

It also lost a few reputable managers such as Lee Kah Choon, Dr Toh Kin Woon and Dr Tan Kee Kwong. Luckily, its “balance sheet” is still pretty healthy with 250,000 shareholders staying loyal to the party. The question is how long this balance sheet can sustain the party if market share continues to decline?

To address this problem, Gerakan has come up with a statement of vision and mission, three thrusts and eight main strategies. Its vision is to be the party of choice for all Malaysians while its mission is to build a united, democratic, just, egalitarian, liberal and progressive nation for all Malaysians, transcending the barriers of race and religion.

NEW VISION AND MISSION

According to legendary CEO Jack Welch, mission and values were the most abstract, overused, misunderstood words in business. He said the exercise of writing mission statements end with a set of generic platitudes that do nothing but leave employees directionless or cynical.

He also said it is unnecessary to list out the virtues such as integrity, quality, excellence, service and respect because these are the values that every decent company should have!

“And frankly, integrity is just a ticket to the game. If you don’t have it in your bones, you shouldn’t be allowed on the field,” Welch said. Similarly, upholding democracy is just a ticket to the game for any decent political parties in Malaysia.

Welch believed that an effective mission statement basically answers one question: How do we intend to win in this business? He said this question will force companies to make choices about people, investments and other resources and it prevents them from falling into the common mission trap of asserting they will be all things to all people at all times.

Taking General Electric’s mission as an example. Welch said the company announced that it was going to be “the most competitive enterprise in the world” by being No 1 or No 2 in every market – fixing, selling, or closing every underperforming business that couldn’t get there”.

He said there could be no doubt about what this mission meant or entailed – it was specific and descriptive, with nothing abstract going.

A SENSE OF DIRECTION

Likewise, Gerakan’s mission needs to be more specific and realistic if the party were to revive again. Perhaps, it is not too far-fetched for Gerakan to set a target for the number of seats that it is going to win in the next general elections and prepare the grassroots from now onwards.

With a clear target, the party will be able to sell a more convincing story of the role it can play in Malaysian politics. Even public listed companies would reveal their profit forecast as a way to boost their stock price as more people want to invest in a company that has the potential to make a lot of money. Currently, Gerakan is akin to an undervalued stock.

While detractors may deride Gerakan’s prospects, a specific mission will at least give party members a sense of direction. In charting a new direction for the party, the leadership at all levels must be willing to take responsibility for any outcomes. They must be willing to sacrifice their positions to stand up for their belief.

Pulling out of BN does not resolve the issue of how the party can differentiate itself from its traditional rivals

If a party leader believes it is not right in terms of principle and timing to pull out of BN despite the prevailing sentiment, then it is his duty to explain to the grassroots. If he needs to bulldoze his ideas through, then he must not hesitate to bulldoze them through. That is the business of a leader.

STRATEGIES

While the leadership must be willing to listen and take decisive actions, the grassroots must be prepared to work hard. The party will collapse if they only criticise the leadership but are not willing to do their part. They should also understand that winning a seat will become more difficult if Gerakan decides to pull out of BN, not joining PR and become a “third force” on its own.

In term of strategies, the party had mentioned it would continue to formulate principled policies, recruit more members, provide political training for its leaders and improve its relationship with the media and non-governmental organisations.

However, it is not enough just to have strategies if the party cannot implement them or does not have the resources to do so. To be realistic, there are many things that Gerakan cannot do simply due to internal constraints at the national and state levels.

Therefore, Gerakan has to prioritise its strategies and implement those which are more important to the party’s goal of winning more seats in the next elections. To increase its market share, a company has to offer better products and services, improve its marketing strategies or create a more efficient supply chain so it can reach out to as many customers as possible.

DIFFERENTIATION

The products of a political parties are its policies based on its ideology while its marketing strategies are how to projects itself to voters. Supply chain is the party’s mechanism to reach out to as many supporters as possible. Due to racial factors, many political parties choose to form alliances to get support from a wider spectrum of the society.

The party that can offer the best policies, project itself in the best light possible and reach out to most voters will naturally win in a particular constituency. At the moment, some party members are still obsessed about pulling out from BN without realising that it would only change some aspects of Gerakan’s product offering but the party will encounter the problem of reaching out to more voters on its own.

Without the “supply chain” offered as package under BN or PR, Gerakan’s appeal would only be limited to a selected group in the urban areas, which will also be the target market of other political parties such as PKR, DAP and MCA. As such, Gerakan will be competing in a “red ocean” that threatens the party’s survival.

What Gerakan needs to do is to find a “blue ocean” by differentiating itself from its traditional rivals, which also claim to profess multiracial politics and social democracy. In this sense, the analysts who suggested that Gerakan should return to its “roots” are only partially correct.

IDEOLOGY

Going forward, multiracialism will be the only acceptable way forward for Malaysia. Hence, it cannot be a substitute for ideology and the party needs to find a new ideology. Honestly, Gerakan’s new ideology is just under its nose – namely, centrist politics and liberalism. It is no longer social democracy, which is also DAP’s domain.

In fact, the socialist elements within Gerakan had long abandoned the party when people like Dr Tan Chee Koon and V David left the party to form Pekemas in 1972. When Pekemas was dissolved following Chee Koon’s retirement in 1977, many of Pekemas members eventually joined DAP.

While DAP appeals to the urban working class, Gerakan has a tradition of attracting professionals and intelligentsia. Like other centrist parties around the world, Gerakan’s target market is the middle-class who appreciates individual freedom over state control and the party must do more to promote itself to these constituencies.

Although pulling out of BN may resolve the question of Gerakan’s commitment towards multiracialism, it does not resolve the issue of how the party can differentiate itself from DAP and PKR. Therefore, party members should opt to stay in BN for now and focus on improving things internally.

As mentioned earlier, Gerakan should focus on improving its policy solution based on its ideology and marketing efforts. It should consider building up its image and networking with other political parties and NGOs before taking the next big step.

Analysis: Is a third force viable under a two-coalition system?

By KEVIN TAN

This is the million ringgit question on the minds of many Gerakan members. Some believe the party can stand on its own outside of Barisan Nasional (BN) while others reckon it should stay in the coalition. There are also those who feel Gerakan should join Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

Of these three options, the notion that Gerakan should become an independent “third force” outside of both BN and PR is the probably the most popular. As such, we need to carefully examine the pros and cons of this “third option” before we make any decision.

Becoming a third force is a lofty idea that is gaining credence lately as reforms are still shortcoming in BN more than six months after the coalition’s dismal performance in March 8 general election. More party members have agitated to leave BN following the Ahmad Ismail episode, the latest ISA arrest and Zaid Ibrahim’s resignation.

Since joining PR is not a viable option as Gerakan has very little bargaining power except for its two parliament and four state seats, some members feel it is better to be independent from both coalitions. As the third party, Gerakan will have the flexibility to support either BN or PR based on issue of the day. It may even play the role of king-maker if there is a tie.

One member who consistently called upon the party to leave BN even believed that Gerakan can negotiate from a position of strength with BN or PR in the next general election. However, it is difficult to imagine how the party can negotiate from a position of strength four years later if the current political configuration remains intact.

There is no doubt that many people would be clapping and cheering if Gerakan leaves BN. Some people also think Gerakan can capitalise on its strong brand name but they forget that the party has not stand under its own brand name since 1969 and its survival is at stake if it makes a hasty decision.

Political scientists, citing Duverger’s Law, reckoned that a third party would not be able win under the first-pass-the-post system in countries with two dominant parties. They explained that most voters would choose either one of the two dominant parties and the third party would only act as a “spoiler”.

Even if the third party can win a few seats, it will not be sufficient to take over the government, which is the ultimate goal of any self respecting political parties. Unless Gerakan is not interested to win elections, becoming a “third force” is probably the best option.

According to Gerakan’s analyst Lai Soon Ket, the party could only win between 20% to 30% of the votes on average in a three-corner fight against BN and PR. While voting pattern may varies from one constituency to another, Gerakan may not even win a single seat in parliament if the trend is evenly distributed.

Estimated percentage of votes for Gerakan, BN, DAP and PKR during general elections

	Malays	Chinese	Indians & others	Overall
GERAKAN (as the third force)	10-30%	25 -40%	20-25%	20-30%
BN (based on Permatang Pauh results)	34-44%	8-18%	38-48%	28-38%
DAP	10-20%	40-50%	30-40%	23-53%
PKR	30-40%	20-30%	20-30%	22-45%

Source: LAI SOON KET

This pattern appears to be consistent with the electoral results achieved by the Liberal Democrats, which is the “third force” in UK behind the Conservatives and Labour. Since the party was formed in 1988 following the merger between the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party, it has not won more than 22.1% of the popular votes or 10% of the seats in the House of Commons.

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS SHARE OF VOTES AND SEATS

Year	Share of popular votes	Seats	Share of seats
1992	17.8%	20	3.1%
1997	16.7%	46	7%
2001	18.3%	52	7.9%
2005	22.1%	62	9.6%

Unlike the Liberal Democrats which have core supporters in dozens of constituencies, Gerakan lost almost everything in Penang, Perak and Selangor. In fact, there is no parliamentary and state constituency that can be considered as the party's stronghold anymore.

To be frank, Gerakan's future is tied to its ability to win seats because not many people will join a party that cannot win elections. In fact, a leading political scientist Leon Epstein has defined a political party as "any group, however loosely organised, seeking to elect governmental office-holders under a given label".

Therefore, a political party must not forsake its chances to win elections in pursue of ideology. Those who argue that Gerakan must go back to its multiracial roots and social democratic ideology should also consider whether the party can win elections.

They must understand that parties with strong ideologies but cannot win elections will also fade away. Just look at Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) and Parti Keadilan Sosial Malaysia (Pekemas).

Led by the late Dr Tan Chee Khoo, Pekemas is a splinter party which broke out from Gerakan following Dr Lim Chong Eu's decision to work with the Alliance and to form BN in 1972.

While PRM survived for decades without winning a single seat, Pekemas lasted only one general election. Out of the 36 parliament seats contested by Pekemas in 1974, only Dr Tan Chee Khoo managed to win. Even Dr Tan Seng Giaw

who contested on Pekemas ticket lost in a three-corner fight in Kepong in 1978. Upon Chee Koon's retirement in 1977, most of Pekemas members defected to DAP.

The experiences of PRM and Pekemas are not excuses for Gerakan to stay put in BN but they remind us that the situation out there for a third force is not a bed of roses either. The party must be aware of the risk and hard work. Therefore, it must calculate its move wisely and not succumb to emotions in making any decisions.

Gerakan's future is tied to its ability to win seats... Parties with strong ideologies but cannot win elections will also fade away

The rise, decline and defeat of Gerakan in Penang: a real insider's view

In the March 2008 General Election, Gerakan suffered a crushing defeat, especially in its traditional stronghold of Penang. Gerakan lost all its 13 state seats and four parliament seats in Penang, a complete reversal of fortune compared to the 100 percent win in state seats and three out of four parliament seats in the 2004 General Elections.

Most analysts and political leaders attributed the loss of Barisan Nasional (BN) in Penang and elsewhere to the arrogance and abuse of power of BN, especially UMNO as BN's largest and most dominant party. But, there was also a lot of criticism against the Gerakan leadership. One such criticism was that after taking over the Penang State Government in 1969, Gerakan should not have joined the BN. In so doing, Gerakan compromised its independence and philosophy of multi-racialism.

Moreover, critics said that Gerakan has moved away from its multi-racial composition and become more Chinese, especially after the influx of MCA members, led by Dr Lim Keng Yaik and then Dato' Michael Chen, who joined the party in 1973 and 1981 respectively. It was also perceived that Gerakan's position in Penang has been eroded slowly but surely, even during Dr Lim Chong Eu's reign (1969 - 1990), but more so after Dr Koh Tsu Koon took over in 1990.

To find out more and to get a real insider's view, we interviewed party veteran, Tan Sri Dato' Dr Chin Fook Weng. Dr Chin joined Gerakan in 1974 and earned distinction as the longest serving municipal councillor in Malaysia for 23 years (from 1974 to 1998). He also served for two terms as a senator in parliament (between 1999-2002 and 2003-2006).

As a trusted confidante of the top leadership for over 30 years, he has been in the inner circle and involved in discussions of major decisions. Dr Chin has also been very much involved in managing membership, party organisation and administration, as well as party and general elections. Since 2000, he has served as the Speaker of Gerakan's National Delegates Conference. He is well-respected within the party as a principled and pragmatic leader who speaks his mind.

Q1 Many people said that Gerakan had a very good start in 1968 as a multi-racial party, with a clear progressive ideology and prominent leaders like Dr Syed Hussein

Alatas, Dr Lim Chong Eu, Dr Tan Chee Koon and V David. However, Gerakan became more and more Chinese-oriented and Chinese-based especially after becoming one of the co-founding parties of the BN. Why Gerakan could not maintain its independence and multi-racialism?

A1 Indeed, Gerakan in 1968 struck the imagination of Malaysians, especially in the urban areas of Penang and Kuala Lumpur. As a result, Gerakan won 16 out of the 24 state seats and took over the Penang State Government in the 1969 General Election, with Dr Lim Chong Eu as the Chief Minister. Overall, Gerakan won eight parliament and 26 state seats.

As the CM, Dr Lim felt that his primary commitment was to the people of Penang. Therefore, he focused on turning around Penang's economy which was then in doldrums with very high unemployment rate. He worked closely with the federal government, especially the second Prime Minister, Tun Razak, to introduce the concept of Free Industrial Zones with tax holidays granted by the federal government. Many multi-national corporations were convinced to set up factories in Penang, providing good job opportunities.

However, a number of leaders maintained that Gerakan should remain independent, playing an opposition role, especially at the federal level. They insisted on campaigning against the Alliance and UMNO in the Yan-Merbok by-election in 1971. Dr Lim strongly objected to this move as it would jeopardise the good federal-state working relationship. This conflict of views led to a breaking point with Syed Hussein, Dr. Tan Chee Koon, V David and other leaders, who eventually left the party. Four out of the 16 Gerakan Assemblymen in Penang also left.

Hence, Gerakan ended up with only half of the seats in the Penang State Legislative Assembly. Its position became unstable and not sustainable. With the support of Tun Razak, four UMNO assemblymen formed a coalition with the 12 Gerakan assemblymen, with two UMNO leaders (including Pak Lah's father, the late Dato' Ahmad Badawi) appointed as Exco members.



Tan Sri Dato' Dr Chin Fook Weng
NDC Speaker

Dr Lim was then able to proceed with the industrialisation, modernisation and urbanisation of Penang and successfully transformed Penang's economy into a modern industrial state. This effort was continued by Dr Koh Tsu Koon who took over in 1990. Penang has thus become one of the most advanced states in Malaysia, with a high standard of living.

Q2 While understanding the problem of having being reduced to only half of the seats, we wondered why Gerakan could not have forged a coalition with DAP and Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia (PSRM) which held three seats and one seat respectively at that time? Why must it be UMNO?

A2 The reality is that, as defined by the Federal Constitution and government administrative framework, Malaysia has been and is still a highly centralised federation. There is high concentration of powers -- legal, fiscal, financial and administrative -- in the federal government.

Therefore, starting in the early 1970s, the Penang State Government needed to work closely with the federal government in order to introduce and implement new initiatives for export-oriented industrialisation, as well as funding for many infrastructure projects, such as the Penang Bridge, expansion of port and airport.

Moreover, Dr Lim supported the strategy of Tun Razak as the Prime Minister to promote co-operation with hitherto opposition parties through a larger coalition not just in Penang (with Gerakan), but also in Perak (with PPP) and Sarawak (with SUPP and SNAP). This strategy was crucial to sustain nationwide political stability and inter-racial harmony in the aftermath of the May 1969 riots. These state-level coalitions were later consolidated into BN in 1974.

Therefore, there was a need to maintain cooperation and cordial relationship with the UMNO-led federal government. Joining forces with other opposition parties would eventually lead to a confrontational approach. All these for the sake of the people of Penang and their future.

Q3 Unfortunately, Gerakan's position in Penang continued to be eroded after the formation of BN, with the allocation of state seats declining from 13 in 1974 to 11 in 1968 and eight in 1982. Why did Gerakan continue to accept this declining position during this period?

A3 The BN was founded as an on-going coalition for stability and not an ad hoc coalition after each general election. BN component parties do not field candidates to fight one another in the same constituency during elections and then come together after general elections to form the government. In fact, the consensus when BN was founded was to start with the seats that every party held at that time. Additional seats were allocated only after each constituency delineation exercise when there was an increase in seats.

The reduction in state seats for Gerakan in Penang between 1974 and 1982 was partly due to the fact that Gerakan decided to be a more national party and expanded into other states by exchanging seats they lost in Penang for seats from other component parties, mainly MCA, in other states. Another factor was the strong lobbying by MCA through central UMNO leadership for more seats in Penang to re-gain MCA's lost position in 1969. MCA's state seats increased from three in 1974 to five in 1978 and eight in 1982, equal to Gerakan. That was the worst allocation given to Gerakan. Fortunately, Gerakan won eight seats compared to six by MCA.

Realising this eroding position, Gerakan took a very firm stand during the 1984 constituency delineation exercise and succeeded in adding three more state seats in Penang, without sacrificing seats in other states. Because BN lost its two-thirds majority in the Penang State Legislative Assembly in the 1990 General Election, the proposal to increase state seats in the 1993 constituency delineation exercise was defeated by the opposition. Hence, Gerakan had to wait until the 2003 exercise before it managed to get an increase of two more state seats out of the seven new seats. UMNO got three while MCA and MIC one each. Thus, Gerakan contested 13 seats in the 2004 and 2008 general elections as compared to UMNO's 15, MCA's 10 and MIC's two. In 2004, Gerakan won all of its 13 seats.

Q4 Dr Lim Chong Eu definitely stood tall as the Father of Industrialisation for Penang and even Malaysia. On the other hand, his successor, Dr Koh Tsu Koon, has been perceived as being rather weak, resulting in further erosion of Gerakan's status in Penang. How would you compare Dr Koh to Dr Lim?

A4 We are actually comparing two different historical circumstances, each with its own challenges and two personalities with their own strengths. Dr Lim who took over the Penang State Government as the CM was swept in by a strong anti-establishment wave during the 1969 General Election. With Gerakan commanding a two-thirds majority by itself, it was in a position of strength, before it was weakened by internal split in 1971, as explained earlier. Twenty one years later in 1990, the opposition parties managed to launch another campaign called "Tanjong 2" led by Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang, combining the strength of DAP and Semangat 46, a splinter party from UMNO. Despite his contributions to Penang and the nation, it was ironical that Dr Lim was defeated by Lim Kit Siang in Padang Kota, which Dr Lim held for six terms.

As a result, the opposition almost toppled the BN state government, winning 14 out of 33 state seats. While UMNO won all of its 12 seats allocated, Gerakan managed to win only seven out of 11. MCA and MIC lost every seats they contested. Although the BN and UMNO top leadership continued to uphold the understanding of Gerakan holding the Chief Minister's post, Dr Koh faced a difficult position of seven Gerakan versus 12 UMNO seats in the BN coalition, faced with 14 DAP representatives as opposition.

Therefore, Dr Koh started off as CM in 1990 with a weaker position than Chong Eu in 1969. Because both MCA and MIC ended up with no state assemblyman, the two Exco seats reserved for both parties were split between UMNO and Gerakan, resulting in five UMNO Exco members versus three from Gerakan, with the post of Deputy Chief Minister going to UMNO. (In 1969, Chong Eu also had a Malay deputy, Mustapha Hussein, but he also came from Gerakan.)

In terms of personality and political career, Chong Eu was a senior statesman by the time he became CM at the age of 50. He started his political career in the early 1950s and belonged to the same generation as the first and second Prime Ministers, Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Razak. In that sense, he was even more senior than the fourth Prime Minister Dr Mahathir, under whom he served from 1981 to 1990.

On the other hand, Dr Koh, who is more than 30 years younger than Dr Lim, was catapulted into the Chief Minister's seat in 1990 at the age of 41, the youngest in Penang's history so far. (Even Lim Guan Eng is now 48 years old). Although he also started his political career when he was 32 years, he was an ordinary Member of Parliament and held the post of Gerakan Youth Chief. He was unfortunate to have been defeated by none other than Lim Kit Siang in 1986 but continued politically as the Chief Minister's political secretary. Hence, it was a different scenario for Dr Koh as compared to Dr Lim.

Moreover, after Dr Koh took over as CM, there was a substantial change in the power relationship between UMNO and Gerakan as compared to Chong Eu's period. From 1981 until 1987, the UMNO State Chairman was Dato' Abdullah Badawi (Pak Lah), the son of Chong Eu's colleague in the Exco. Since the mid 80s, Anwar Ibrahim, then a rising star in UMNO as the Youth chief, took over as UMNO state chief. Throughout this period until 1990, Chong Eu as the CM and BN state chairman was more senior than the UMNO state chairman.

After 1990, while Anwar was still a Federal Minister and UMNO Vice-President, his position was at par with Dr Koh as the Penang Chief Minister and Gerakan Vice-President. From the state's protocol point of view, Dr Koh took precedence over Anwar. At that time, when Anwar came to Penang, he called on Dr Koh in the Chief Minister's office. In this sense, Dr Koh was slightly more senior than Anwar.

This power relationship changed the moment Anwar became UMNO Deputy President, BN Deputy National Chairman and Deputy Prime Minister in 1993. His position both in government and party rose above those of Dr Koh, who had to receive him at the airport. This continued when Pak Lah took over as DPM in 1999 and subsequently became the PM in 2003.

“Dr Koh did hold himself well and ran a clean and efficient state government, despite pressures from the Opposition and even from both UMNO and MCA within BN.”

Both Anwar and Abdullah Badawi continued as Penang UMNO State Chairman. Hence, since 1993, Dr Koh had to deal with an UMNO Penang chairman who was also a DPM or PM. This change in power relationship with UMNO Penang leadership had undoubtedly made Dr Koh's position more daunting as compared to Chong Eu. Nonetheless, Dr Koh did hold himself well and ran a clean and efficient state government, despite pressures from the Opposition and even from both UMNO and MCA within BN.

Q5 Acknowledging the difference in seniority and power relationship, was Dr Koh not strong enough to stand up against UMNO's pressure? What has he achieved in terms of promoting multiracialism and multiculturalism within the BN state government of Penang?

A5 No doubt, Dr Koh as an academician does give an impression of being gentle and gentlemanly, perhaps a bit too much so. But, it is not fair to say that he had not or could not stand up against pressure. He handled well attacks from the 14 opposition members in the State Legislative Assembly, led by none other than Lim Kit Siang. His lively debates against Kit Siang can be seen from the verbatim hansards, though not videotaped.

One widely known case was his firm rejection of the proposed Penang Hill project in 1992, despite tremendous pressure from the then PM, Dr Mahathir. As a result, he antagonised a very powerful business group who subsequently kept trying to under-mind him politically until today! It was also in 1992 that he managed to stand firm against Penang UMNO's pressure and get the then Gerakan Penang state chief appointed as the President of the Penang Island Municipal Council (MPPP), the first non-Malay to hold this post since the mid-1970.

By being very close to the people, Dr Koh managed to harness a lot of popular support in the run-up to the 1995 General Elections. He led the BN Penang to a resounding victory over the opposition, against DAP's Tanjong 3 campaign. Not only did he personally defeat Kit Siang by a wide margin, BN managed to reduce the opposition strength in the State Legislative Assembly from 14 seats

to only one. After having secured such a convincing majority, he managed to quickly convince the then PM to amend both the Federal and State Constitutions to increase the maximum number of Exco members from eight to ten. By so doing, he changed the Exco formula from 4:2:1:1 for UMNO, Gerakan, MCA and MIC respectively to 4:3:2:1, whereby both Gerakan and MCA got an additional Exco seat each. This new formula changed UMNO's 50 percent in Exco to 40 percent.

The increase to 10 Exco members for every state also enabled Gerakan to get one Exco post each in Kedah, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan since 1995. Gerakan could thus grow beyond Penang (with CM and 3 ExcOs) and Perak (also with one Exco post). He also went about opening up top government agency posts in Penang to non-Malays, in addition to the MPPP President. In 1996, a Gerakan leader was appointed as the Port Commission Chairman, a post which had hitherto been held by an UMNO leader.

In 1999, with the corporatisation of the Penang Water Authority, he himself took over the chairmanship post, which was also hitherto held by an UMNO leader. In 1999, a non-Malay officer was appointed for the first time in 30 years since 1970 to the second highest state post of State Financial Officer. Between 1999 and 2003, Penang's Chief Police Officer was Datuk Arthur Edmonds and he was succeeded by Datuk Christopher Wan.

In the socio-cultural front, Dr Koh, as the Gerakan Exco member in charge of culture and tourism, was instrumental in sponsoring and galvanising NGO initiatives to support the festivals of various communities such as Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Chinese New Year, Deepavali and Christmas. These were proved to be so successful and popular that the federal government was convinced to sponsor such festivals at the national level graced by the Agong. Therefore, Dr Koh's rather low profile and gentlemanly style of leadership is proven effective in not only running a relatively clean and efficient state government but also promoting multiracialism and multiculturalism, in accordance with Gerakan's ideology.

Gerakan speaks!

For a long time, most BN component parties, including Gerakan, believed they could resolve issues behind closed doors. While closed-door discussions had resolved many issues, people could not see the efforts put in by the various parties. Sensing a need to make Gerakan more visible, party leaders have been making their voice heard. The following are some of their recent quotable quotes.



Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon
Acting President

On the ISA...

“There is no reason why anyone should be subject to the provisions of this act which simply means detention without trial when the authorities can use the judicial system instead.”

On Pakatan Rakyat’s bid to topple the BN government...

“Let the government elected by the people, be it at the federal level and the state-level including the states under Pakatan, shows what it can do until the people make another decision in the next general election.”

On Sin Chew Daily reporter Tan Hoon Cheng’s detention...

“The person who burnt down the house is still free, while the person who cried fire is detained.”

On staying in BN...

“We will remain in Barisan Nasional only in the context that we have a meaningful role to play. It’s not unconditional, as was reported by one press, that Gerakan will always remain in Barisan, as if it were irrespective of whether we have a role (to play) or not.”

To assure party members that Gerakan listens to the grassroots’ opinions...

“Gerakan is always open to opinions, especially suggestions to revive the party and its role in the Barisan Nasional coalition.”

“Whatever their feelings are, members should analyse the situation as well as take into consideration the current political scenario and the strength of the party when making decisions.”



Dato' Dr S Vijayarajam
Vice President

On the Permatang Pauh by-election...

“Candidates should tell the people what they plan to do for them, and not deliver irrelevant, high-level rhetoric, or worse, indulge in character assassination; it may be good to listen to, but does little to advance the lot of the common man.”



Dato' Dr Teng Hock Nan
Vice President

On Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) student protests against Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim's proposal to open up to 10% of the university intakes to non-Bumiputeras and foreigners...

“The protest shows that these students have become so intolerant and polarised along racial lines to the point that they cannot even accept a proposal that augurs well for national unity and raises the competitiveness of the graduates.”



Dato' Chang Ko Youn
Vice President

On Gerakan being perceived as a Chinese-based parties...

“Do not view us as Chinese, Malays or Indians. We are Malaysians, we should think and act as Malaysians.”



Dato' Seri Chia Kwang Chye
Secretary-General

On the multiethnic character of Gerakan...

“Gerakan will continue to treasure the contribution and nurture the development of our leaders from all ethnic backgrounds with particular attention to achieve a more balanced representation, especially among the young.”



Datuk Ng Chiang Chin
National Treasurer

On the proposal to open up to 10% of Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) intakes to non-Bumiputeras and foreigners...

“Vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Seri Dr Ibrahim Abu Shah, who hit out at Khalid for his progressive view, is doing a great disservice to his own university.”

“As an educator and administrator of an institution of higher learning, Prof Ibrahim should be proud if more Malaysians are keen to enrol in UiTM instead of reserving the university exclusively for Bumiputeras.”

Dato' Mah Siew Keong
Pemuda Chief

On the merger of all BN component parties...

“The merger between 14 BN component parties into 1 BN multiracial party shall be treated as a move to unite the Malaysian society. A party that unites all Malaysians irrespective of race and religion will be a giant step towards Bangsa Malaysia.”



Dato' Tan Lian Hoe
Wanita Chief

On the tearing of Dr Koh's photograph by some UMNO members in Penang...

“I would like to ask all Umno members nationwide how they will feel if the picture of Umno president is torn by a member of BN component party.”

Reform or Perish

An Interview with National Adviser Tun Lim Keng Yaik

In Off The Edge (OTE) magazine September 2008 issue

Compiled by **Ivanpal Singh Grewal**

In an interview with The Edge's Editor-in-Chief Ho Kay Tat and OTE editor Jason Tan recently, Tun Lim Keng Yaik gave a frank assessment on what is happening in Malaysian politics, including the situation in Gerakan following the March 8 political tsunami. Gerakan Matters! reproduces excerpts from the interview here.

Ho: So on reflection, what happened on March 8?

Lim: When I handed things over in April 2007 things were not as bad, but there were some rumblings on the ground from the urban Chinese electorate. We have the worst kind of UMNO arrogance as a result of the 2004 GE (when UMNO and BN did very well). The abuse of power, corruption, 'negotiated tenders' with government tenders mainly going to UMNO-associated companies. All this is not decided by the Cabinet but by the Ministry of Finance. You think people don't know? Obviously the people know (going by the March 8 election results). Prices are jacked up and there is no check on the implementation of projects.

And then you had the UMNO assembly (which was telecast live) and everyone saw how racist its members can become. All these things put us as component party members in a very difficult situation. And then Hindraf came into the picture. So we knew before going into March 8 that it was very bad.

In the end it turned out to be the worst-case scenario as we ended up not only losing Penang but totally wiped out. (Gerakan lost all the state and parliamentary seats it contested in its home-base of Penang). We did not have the feel of the urban Malays. We did not anticipate that the urban Malays would be attracted to PKR.

Ho: **Pakatan Rakyat was able to convince Malays, Chinese and Indians to vote across racial lines. That was the key.**

Lim: Quite true, and credit must be given to Anwar. Anwar is an astute politician who knows the feelings on the ground; he knows the attitude of urban Malays and he definitely knew the anger of the Chinese and Indian communities. He knew how to convince them to vote

across racial lines. He was able to get PAS to suppress its theocratic Islamic approach and get DAP to tone down their urban Chinese rhetoric and be a bit more humble. So he was able to moderate the two extremes of PAS and DAP and appeared together (with PKR) as a multiracial coalition that can represent the people.

Ho: **You said that all these years you have spoken to UMNO leaders about changing their image and style. What exactly have people like you or MCA or MIC done, what did you actually do to talk to UMNO?**

Lim: All these times, we were imbued with the understanding, the spirit of not rocking the boat (laughs). 'Not rocking the boat' in the sense that whatever you want to talk, talk inside (the Cabinet and BN supreme council) but don't talk outside. That worked against us, (the other) component parties.

On one hand, the arrogance, the abuse of power and the corruption within UMNO was quite easily seen by the public. On the other hand, we (the other BN parties) were not seen to be saying something about it, doing something about it.

That's why in my last press conference as cabinet minister in March that if you suspect that I didn't raise it (With UMNO) I will challenge you. The only thing was that I didn't raise it outside [the Cabinet and BN Supreme Council]. For that, I take responsibility.

Ho: **Do you think they have got the message now after March 8?**

Lim: I don't think so, or maybe they're too preoccupied with their own party elections to come around to thinking and analysing what happened. But I think, being racially based they think they can still turn the Malay votes. So the first thing they did after March 8 was to talk to pas. 'hey, Malay unity is threatened lah. These DAP fellas are questioning your Islamic status, we better come together.' From Tun Razak's days they have always been saying, 'we could have formed a Malay government, but we don't want a Malay government we want a multiracial government.'



I asked Najib, are you thinking about rebranding Umno and BN? In terms of consumerism, the existing brand **'tak boleh pakai lagi'**

Ho: Given that you think UMNO will not change, what will happen to BN? What will happen to Gerakan? It's end game for Gerakan right?

Lim: It's not the end of the situation yes multiracial politics was on the menu after March 8. Was March 8 a one-time phenomenon?

I have been saying we are not deserters. We are willing to work with and talk to our UMNO partner to change and follow what the people want in terms of less racial politics, more transparency. Don't just say you want to go against corruption, starting with your own party-with your own leadership-instead of just going for the civil servants. They will turn against you. Kepimpinan melalui teladan, the civil servants will follow suit.

We have said in no uncertain terms that UMNO must change. It's too early to tell, six months after the March 8 election; they now have their own party elections. Have they fallen into a pit and cannot climb out of it? Or will they try, after they settle down after their party elections. But they need to change.

At my daughter's wedding recently I spoke to Najib. I said I was part of the 1969 tsunami (when the alliance of UMNO, MCA, MIC lost Penang to Gerakan and Kelantan to PAS). After his father took over as PM, I joined the reformation movement in the MCA and got expelled. (Lim was at that time the youngest Cabinet minister)

After 1969, Razak rebranded the alliance by forming the BN (roping in opposition parties like Gerakan, SUPP, PAS, PPP).

I asked Najib, are you thinking about rebranding UMNO and BN? In terms of consumerism, the existing brand tak boleh pakai lagi (past its shelf life).

Ho: What is the mood of the Gerakan members? We hear that some Gerakan members have left the party.

Lim: Not particularly or too much to worry about. There will be some adjustments. Certain well meaning people

want to take over the leadership. My job is to tell this certain people that the next round (of party elections) will be different from the previous. The last time, you controlled the party machinery and rose up the party that way. No more. You have to rise on your own accord. You have to be recognised by the rakyat so that the party can choose you.

March 8 may be a blessing in disguise. We now have to go back to basic, go back to democracy and meritocracy. After 40 years in government, complacency has set in.

And I take the blame as the president for 26 years, of not pushing –recognising it, but not pushing for it. A lot of people know me as a reformist in the party but I did not push hard enough.

But I was able to bring a few younger people like Lee Kah Choon (who has since left Gerakan to accept a post as head of InvestPenang offered to him by the DAP-led state government). He was my choice for chief minister of Penang. The DAP now recognises his ability but our people didn't.

Ho: But would it have made any difference of Kah Choon was named before the election as the potential CM?

Lim: I don't know. I don't know. Would it have made a difference if I had stood in Bruas? I don't know. (Perak Gerakan chief Datuk Chang Ko Youn lost contested in Lim's parliamentary seat of Bruas and lost).

Ho: What do you think of the book (Non-sectarian Politics: The case of PGRM) that just came out about the party?

Lim: Intellectual dishonesty.

Ho: The authors are Gerakan insiders

Lim: Intellectual dishonesty.

Tan: In what way?

Lim: Using their position, being paid by the party, and to go against the party to promote himself. That is Khoo Kay Peng.

May 8 may be a blessing in disguise. We have to go back to basics, go back to democracy and meritocracy

Ho: Was he a whistleblower?

Lim: Not a whistleblower but a self-promoter

Ho: But what about the issues he brought up? Is there anything he has written is not true?

Lim: Certain amount is true, certain amount is concocted.

Ho: He was the head of your think-tank SEDAR.

Lim: He was not thinking for us, he was thinking for himself.

Ho: What happened in Penang before the elections, the jockeying to be the next CM?

Lim: There were people, businessmen who tried to decide who should be the next CM.

That's why I told Tsu Koon, stay back. If he has stayed back it would not have become an issue. But he insisted on contesting for parliament. Maybe he couldn't stand the pressure of UMNO (in the state) anymore.

One month before the election, I told Tsu koon he must stay back. He was still popular with the people but the developers were not happy with him because of his negative attitude towards them in terms of approval of certain development projects. But he did it in all sincerity to protect the interests of Penang.

But when Tsu Koon decided he didn't want to remain (in the state) and we couldn't decide on who should be the nominee for the CM post, there were many people inside and outside the party who got involved and everyone had their preferred candidates. At one stage, we had already decided and agreed on the candidate and we were supposed to announce it when releasing the election manifesto, but at the last minute somebody interfered and it wasn't done.

Ho: Are you suggesting that a new government of national reconciliation be formed using a new brand name, like in 1974?

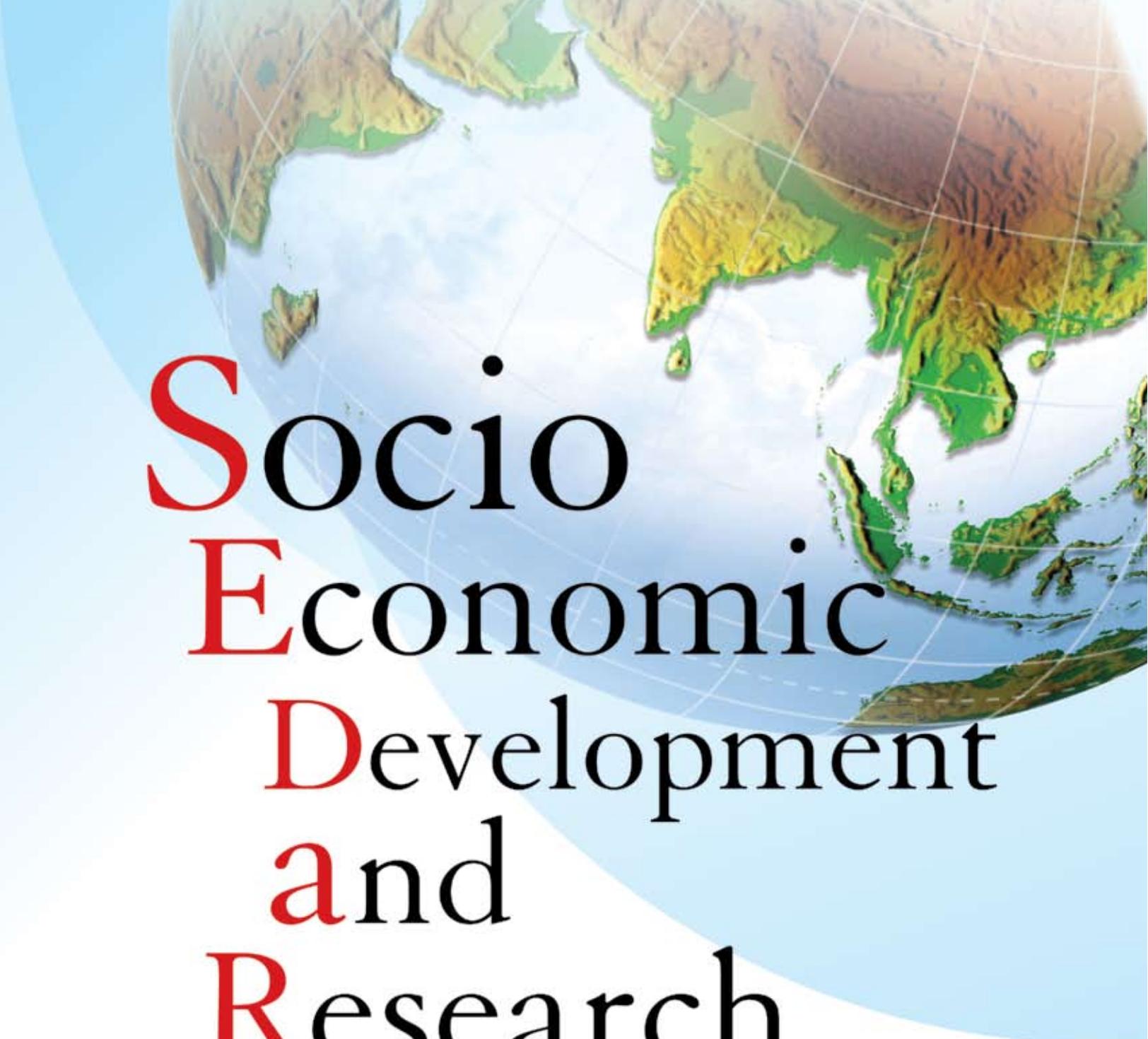
Lim: That is one way of rebranding, but you don't have to follow. Come on think la out of the box. I have my way of thinking, which I am not going to reveal yet.

Ho: Well the criticism of Gerakan is that it couldn't even file a non-Chinese candidate in the last GE. PKR was the most multi-racial party. Gerakan's argument has always been, don't look at the colour of the person but his approach, but the reality is that colour is the thing people see.

Lim: That is if you are within a racially based coalition. If a non-rationally based opposition, you can out any type of candidate in any constituency...

Ho: There are some BN leaders and sympathisers who console themselves by saying that many voters now regret what they did on March 8. Do you agree with that?

Lim: I don't think so, there's certain amount of change [that's necessary]. And the change is not purely on the multiracial aspect; the change is on governance. I have passed word to my party leadership that in BN, when it comes to any problem concerning the Malays, Chinese and Indians, the BN multiracial leadership must be seen as discussing it together. That's what Anwar has done; at every press conference he's either got Hadi or Hadi's representative, Lim Guan Eng or Lim Kit Siang next to him.



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