

05/08/2001

Delegates can surely put aside differences to pursue MCA's agenda

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THOSE expecting the MCA general assembly yesterday to feature a similar atmosphere as that in the Youth wing's AGM a day earlier must have been disappointed.

Living up to its image as the more mature section, yesterday's meeting of the party's highest body paled in comparison with the flying chairs, bomb threat and shouting matches that characterised the Youth meeting.

Nobody, of course, was complaining of an absence of drama. Perhaps, the delegates were older - and wiser. There was no show of tantrum-throwing. Perhaps too, they were ashamed by Friday's violence and wanted to make up with good behaviour.

After all, Barisan Nasional chairman and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and several component party leaders were there and MCA could ill-afford another shameful scene.

But certainly, Dr Mahathir's opening address had an effect on the delegates' decorum.

Expressing confidence that the MCA could settle its problems amicably, Dr Mahathir also described the party, together with Umno, of which he is the president, as "the backbone of BN".

To further boost the confidence of the delegates, the Prime Minister did not run down the violent behaviour of certain Youth delegates but instead conceded that it was normal for any party to face internal problems.

Dr Mahathir also said that when Umno faced a crisis in 1987, MCA provided the BN with a strong leadership and likewise, Umno would be loyal to the MCA.

If Dr Mahathir was trying to provide the beleaguered second-most senior party in BN with a morale-booster, he certainly had not failed.

How far MCA members would abide by the advice of the Prime Minister remains to be seen. Surely, after months of arguing, and with the party election so near, it is unlikely that a pep talk will have a long-lasting effect.

But if delegates yesterday could put aside their differences to disappoint those expecting "fireworks" during the assembly, surely they could do the same to pursue the party's agenda.

If differences of opinion during the debates yesterday were not expressed through throwing of chairs and physical threat, surely diverse views among the party's central committee members could be discussed.

MCA has a long agenda ahead. At a time when the Chinese electorate's support for the DAP is waning, MCA should be aggressively wooing the community.

The proposed MCA-run Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman is just one on the list of agendas.

In the aftermath of the SJK (C) Damansara relocation controversy and the problems of high-achieving students unable to gain admission into public universities, the party should be spending time reaching out to the Chinese community.

Surely squabbling over the technicalities of a meeting, like the one over the legality of the Youth extraordinary general meeting, would not help.

In this respect, the party's Wanita wing can provide some lessons. Practically immuned from the controversies surrounding the Youth wing and parent body, over 30 community projects had been carried out over the past

year.

The Youth assembly did not announce the number of similar projects carried out over the same period, but considering its leaders had engaged in endless arguments - from the Chang Min Thein Education Fund to the Nanyang takeover - it is unlikely the projects were as effective.

This does not mean that there is no room for dissent in the party. It is the manner in which opposing views are put forward that are more important.

As it is, there were already rumours that the controversial Youth EGM on June 23 would end up in the courts. Perhaps, some Youth leaders are adamant about a technical victory than the welfare of the wing.

It is this kind of immaturity that cannot be tolerated and can lead to its destruction. And MCA can ill-afford such attitude.