

MCA's star fades, DAP's rocket fires up
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Following the announcement of Lai Meng Chong and Liou Chen Kuang as the candidates for the Barisan Nasional (BN) and DAP respectively, the stage is set for a one-to-one duel in the Machap by-election.

Despite earlier observations that, given the overwhelming firepower that the ruling coalition can concentrate on the by-election and natural vulnerabilities as well as self-inflicted weaknesses of DAP, the mood and situation in Machap seem to have undergone a pro-opposition change.

The magnitude of which can only be known when polling is completed.

The main factor that has contributed to the change of mood and situation is that MCA's propaganda machine has miscalculated the effectiveness of exploiting the internal contradictions of DAP as many non-partisan voters do not seem to be concerned about the issue which is perceived as part and parcel of politics across the board.

Check and balance

More passionate supporters of DAP also point out that even Umno and MCA, MCA and Gerakan and Gerakan and PPP squabble in the public domain.

For those who are less loyal to DAP but angry enough with BN and MCA for all sorts of reasons, whatever happens inside DAP is of no concern to them as long as the opposition party can continue to play its role externally to check and balance against the ruling coalition and provide a channel for the people to voice their grievances.

Certainly, the MCA propaganda machinery, now mainly staffed by younger and less experienced employees, has 'opened fire' too early not knowing that ordinary people could become bored and tired of negative messages of political polemics. After all, that MCA attacks opposition parties' 'internal politics' is not new or innovative.

Another important factor is that, despite the earlier public squabble over the allocation of seats, DAP and Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) appear to have reconciled, at least for the moment, to confront a common 'enemy'.

Now, PKR 's information chief and most well-known Chinese leader Tian Chua has been appointed with full authority by his party to lead a solidarity campaign to Machap to assist DAP.

Another Chinese heavyweight of PKR, Dr Lee Boon Chye has also lent a helping hand by attacking MCA's 'history of mismanagement' and 'betrayal' of mother-tongue education as well as other legitimate rights of the Chinese community.

PKR leaders like Chua have already begun speaking on DAP's platform in Machap and it is expected that more PKR top guns like its advisor Anwar Ibrahim, president Dr

Wan Azizah Wan Ismail and her deputy Dr Syed Husin Ali would join in the campaign later.

Another backfiring factor

So, as long as MCA's strategy of causing dissention and disunity among the opposition does not work, DAP stands a good chance in Machap to secure a respectable amount of votes to give hope to the opposition in the coming general elections.

Another potential backfiring factor for the BN is the involvement of the Information Ministry on the side of MCA because it would further reinforce the traditional image of MCA as a 'big bully' and DAP as the 'underdog'. The political culture of Chinese working classes is essentially pro-underdog and anti-hegemonic.

However, even given these relatively favourable change of mood and condition in Machap for the opposition, it is still difficult to see a victory for DAP as it lacks the resources to help the voters build roads, renovate schools, clear up clogged drains and grant land titles.

Moreover, DAP's mainstream groups are never known for patience, skill and dedication to build up local organisations as the traditional culture of the party's grassroots seems to be one of psychological dependence on the last-minute 'star performance' of its top leaders like Lim Kt Siang, Karpal Singh and Lim Guan Eng for the deliverance of the people 'out of Egypt'.

In any event, the strategic objective of DAP in the Machap by-election is not to win the seat but to gain a respectable and credible quantum of votes.

With a more realistic expectation and humbler attitude, DAP can certainly hope to perform and score better than any worse-case scenari projection.

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