

## **Five-round bruiser, but who's the loser?**

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The historic debate between MCA president Dr Chua Soi Lek and DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng saw fiery performances from the two debaters, albeit both ended up straying from the topic.

The debate, 'Chinese at the crossroads - is the two-party system becoming a two-race system?', saw the duo played their usual cards, touching on issues already heard repeatedly on the ceramah circuits.

For Chua, his arguments were based on two main points - that DAP cannot stop PAS' Islamic state agenda and that DAP was pitting Chinese Malaysians against one another.

chua soi lek debate lim guan eng with moderator tan ah chai 2As for Lim, he relied mostly on the successes of the Penang government which he leads, as proof that Pakatan Rakyat's policies are viable.

Chua adopted a highly aggressive style during the one-hour debate, where his spoke off the cuff with both arms flailing to stress his points.

On the other hand, Lim dropped his usual "street fighter" mode, a characteristic often mentioned by Chua in the past, and instead adopted a laidback approach, beaming throughout the debate.

The duo brought along a boisterous crowd, estimated at 200 each, who whooped, cheered and thump tables for the respective speakers.

lim guan eng chua soi lek debate crowdIn anticipation of a rowdy crowd, hotel staff even removed glass cups and candy holders from the conference tables, possibly to prevent them from being used as projectiles.

Some MCA supporters jeered at Lim when he spoke but tensions increased noticeable during the second half of the debate, which saw some DAP supporters retaliating when Chua spoke.

At one point, moderator Tang Ah Chai was forced to call for calm, and told the supporters to be respectful of their rivals.

### Round 1: Opening remarks

After a coin-flip, Chua was chosen to be the first speaker and drew first blood by claiming that DAP was prone to "talking big" and that the party cannot stop PAS' Islamic state agenda.

He said that DAP had inevitably mislead the Chinese voters into thinking that the appointment of a DAP chief minister can be emulated outside Penang.

Debate Lim Guan EngIn response, Lim said that BN seemed to be contradicting itself as Umno has claimed that PAS was being dictated by DAP, while MCA claims DAP is under PAS control.

He said that the three Pakatan component parties do not exploit one another but instead are only concerned about how the public make use of them.

Lim said under Umno, Malaysia is split along racial lines which is why Pakatan is trying to bring about reforms and a two-party system.

"Umno only knows how to cry 'Malay supremacy'. Can't MCA see or hear this? Pakatan is promoting the

'supremacy of the people'," said Lim.

Round 2: Question from the moderator

For this round, speakers would have to answer a question from Tang, the moderator, which read: Since the 2008 general election, society is split into two sides. How will you gain the support from the other side?

Somehow, Chua skirted the question and instead attacked Pakatan parties for abandoning the constituencies where they lose.

"Even their offices are closed down (after they lose)," said Chua, who summed up that the proposed two-party system was merely a political slogan.

Lim told Tang that Pakatan would promote its policies and if given a chance to govern, Malaysia would become a "policy state" instead of the current "police state".

Round 3: Q&A from the floor

Following this, the question-and-answer session saw mostly MCA supporters taking the microphone, asking questions that were totally unrelated to the topic.

Lim was bombarded with issues ranging from PAS' Islamic state agenda, unfulfilled election pledges, to Kedah and Perak government policies.

He said that since Pakatan took over several states in 2008, the public could feel that changes have taken place.

On a question about the abolition of highway toll charges, Lim said the promises can only be fulfilled if Pakatan took over the federal government.

However, the Penang state government had help construct a slip road to allow motorists to avoid the Sungai Nyoir toll booth.

When it was Chua's turn to respond, a DAP supporter interjected, claiming that the Tang had overlooked another corner of the ballroom where DAP supporters were lining up to ask questions.

Tang asked Chua to continue, in which he claimed that DAP had failed to fulfil its promise to allocate land to Chinese schools in Perak in the 11 months it was in power.

Round 4: One question each

The next session involved speakers posing a question to each other.

Lim asked: "We only see MCA leaders being charged over the Port Klang Free Zone scandal. No Umno leaders were charged. Does the Umno leaders have immunity?"

Chua responded by accusing Lim of racism for asking why only Chinese were nabbed over the issue.

As for Chua, he asked Lim what plans does Pakatan have in order to turn the country into a "high-income nation".

Lim responded by again referring to Penang, stating that it was prudent in managing the state, conducted open tenders and tackling graft seriously, which helped to increase the state coffers.

Round 5: Q&A Part II, wind-up

At the instruction of the TV station which was providing a live broadcast of the debate, Tang called for a second round of questions, possibly to address the earlier complaint.

However, only two DAP supporters were able to pose questions before the microphone were taken by MCA supporters, causing DAP supporters to again cry foul.

Tang told Malaysiakini later that he was merely acting on instructions of the broadcasters.

In his winding-up speech, Lim finally went on the offensive and asked if MCA was willing to stand up to Umno.

"As former MCA president Ong Tee Keat once said, MCA is only being fed crumbs," he said, adding that MCA was a toothless despite having government positions.

Lim threw his final jab at Chua by stating "PAS has never killed a single Chinese. This is a fact", in an apparent allusion to the death of Teoh Beng Hock.

When it was Chua's turn, he surprised journalists and DAP supporters by honing in on Ong's "bread crumbs" quote.

"It is because he (Ong) cannot lead, that was why he was taken down in less than a year," he said, prompting huge cheers from his supporters, but confusion from the DAP crowd.

Some DAP supporters responded by shouting "MCA internal conflict".

And after the final bell...

As Tang brought the debate to a close, Chua walked over to Lim and the duo held hands to pose for photographers before leaving the ballroom together.

dap set pak lah free forum 121006 khoo kay pengMet after the event, veteran political analyst Khoo Kay Peng (left) told Malaysiakini that although both speakers had deviated from the topic, the debate was a good effort.

He said that Malaysian politicians need to behave less hostile and avoid indulging in a game of one-upmanship.

"It is not always about one-upmanship. It is about coming together to do something good for the country.

"Rightfully, the two coalitions should tell the voters how they can steer the country away from a two-race system, rather than use race as a weapon to ask the people to vote for them," he said.

Although a winner from the debate is unclear, many netizens and journalists agree that the biggest loser of the event were supporters of both coalitions, who were too rowdy.

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