

## **Forcing a paradigm shift in MCA and Umno**

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COMMENT Much has been written about MCA and Gerakan's decision not to join the cabinet following their poor performance in the recently concluded general elections.

NONE Some commentators have said that because Malaysia is a multiracial country, there must be Chinese representation in the cabinet to look after Chinese needs. That's an interesting notion because MCA and Gerakan ministers have never assumed the position of Chinese affairs minister or anything like that. Such a position doesn't exist.

They take up other positions like transport minister or health minister or energy, water and communications minister. So, how do they look after Chinese interests if their job is to look after transportation, health or energy, water and communications issues?

Perhaps, they can speak up about Chinese-related issues privately to the prime minister. But do they have to be in the cabinet to speak the PM about such issues? Aren't there other channels to highlight such issues besides being in the cabinet?

In fact, if the PM really wanted to understand Chinese concerns, he should speak to opposition leaders for it's obvious they have a better handle of Chinese grouses than MCA or Gerakan leaders.

NONE Besides, if it's Chinese representation in the cabinet that people are worried about, the prime minister can always appoint prominent members of the Chinese community as senators and make them ministers.

But who exactly is calling for Chinese representation in the cabinet? Former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad has called for it. So has Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin. Columnist Azman Ujang has done so, too.

Notice something? They're all Malays. The elephant in the room that needs to be addressed is that hardly any Chinese people are calling for this!

As Sin Chew Daily columnist Tay Tian Yan noted in his article 'Does MCA still have a future?', "The Chinese community no longer expects anything from the MCA and even the party's decision of not taking any posts in the cabinet has failed to arouse

significant reaction."

NONEThe reason is obvious. MCA made it clear enough that it would not take up any cabinet posts if the party fared worse than in 2008. Despite that, the Chinese community still largely voted for the opposition. Is it not obvious that no MCA representation is something Chinese voters are not particularly concerned about?

For many years now, the Chinese community has felt that MCA has not adequately stood up for Chinese rights in the face of increasing hardline stances taken by some Umno leaders. Even Ong Tee Keat, seen by many to be an outspoken maverick within MCA, does not speak up against Umno. I don't recall him saying anything about the keris-wielding antics of some Umno leaders during the Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (Pak Lah) years.

More recently, MCA president Chua Soi Lek gave away several seats to Umno and even vouched for Perkasa's Zulkifli Noordin (who stood under a BN ticket), saying he has repented.

'Chinese were not duped'

The Chinese were not duped by the opposition, as some BN politicians have suggested. They simply don't care for the kind of representation that MCA has to offer.

There are calls for MCA to reconsider its decision not to take part in the cabinet. Will it? There are already some cracks. Pulau Sebatang state assemblyperson Tee Siew Kiong has agreed to be in the Johor exco.

By Thursday, we should know if MCA and Gerakan will stick to their decision to stay out of the cabinet at the federal level. If these parties change their minds, not only would they lose whatever little credibility they have left, they would become a laughing stock.

For a whole range of reasons, it makes sense of these parties to stay out of the cabinet. Firstly, it respects the wishes of its target constituency, the Chinese voters, who knew exactly what was at stake and still voted for the opposition.

NONESecondly, it gives these parties the time to do some serious soul-searching on what to do going forward. Being away from the cabinet frees them from being beholden to Umno and thus allows them to make more independent decisions about their own future.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, it forces Umno to come to terms with the reality that it actually needs MCA and Gerakan as much as they need it.

This kind of mutual symbiosis is something that DAP, PKR and PAS have always been aware of, which is why there is no party that assumes the role of "Big Brother" in Pakatan Rakyat. All three parties are more or less equal.

The same cannot be said of Barisan Nasional which has Umno playing the "Big Brother" role all along. This colours the way Umno deals with its partners in the coalition and as a result, makes its partners look subservient.

It's funny that Umno supreme council member Mohamad Nazri Abdul Aziz should say to the Chinese: "If you want to punish MCA, whack MCA in their seats, why take it out on the rest of BN?" What he clearly fails to understand is that the Chinese voters are against MCA because of how it kowtows to Umno.

Chinese voters are not naïve or misinformed. They don't need MCA to tell them that a vote for DAP is a vote for PAS. This is 2013, not 1999 and Chinese voters are fine with that. In fact, many directly voted for PAS, not because they like PAS but because they dislike Umno.

Chinese voters also don't need anyone to tell them a vote for MCA is a vote for Umno. And that is the primary reason they voted for the opposition. Make no mistake, it was not a protest vote. The Chinese, together with most urban and young voters from all races - and actually most of Malaysia, as evidence by the popular vote won by Pakatan - voted for regime change. Perhaps this is something someone needs to tell Nazri Aziz.

What will Najib do?

Come tomorrow, we'll know how Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has chosen to deal with the unprecedented dilemma of both MCA and Gerakan declining to be a part of the cabinet.

Even if he appoints Chinese politicians from East Malaysian parties and also appoints a few non-politicians through senatorship, it's doesn't solve the problem of a BN with a drastically reduced non-bumiputera presence.

NONEFor once, Umno is forced to think out of the box and to seriously reconsider how it deals with its coalition partners. This would not be the case if MCA and Gerakan were to accept cabinet positions, which would give Umno the easy way out because it would be business as usual.

The same Big Brother situation. The same kowtowing by MCA and Gerakan. The same derision from the very community that these parties are supposed to represent.

In such a scenario, neither MCA nor Gerakan would have any chance of reforming itself with the hope of becoming relevant again. By refusing to join the cabinet, they would, in fact, be buying time and space for themselves to reform and just possibly, for their Big Brother to do so, too.

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