

## **Is Soi Lek flexing his muscles or playacting?**

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When MCA president Dr Chua Soi Lek came to the helm of the party after an exhausting and divisive contest against two other party greats, many thought that the party was as good as finished.

chinese economic congress 140810 chua soi lek Many political observers opined that Chua (right), despite being more combative than his predecessor Ong Tee Keat, would ultimately cave in to the demands of Umno, the biggest component party in Barisan Nasional.

And yet, Chua, in his five months since assuming power of the second largest BN component party, is already proving that he is determined not to walk in Ong's shadow and is taking on Umno.

Or is he?

In just the past one month, Chua has - whether intentionally or not - stepped on many Umno toes with his no-holds-barred approach to issues. And those issues happen to be religion and the New Economic Policy, two key points in Umno's struggle.

It started when MCA's deputy publicity chief Loh Seng Kok called for the government to rescind its ban on non-Muslims using the word 'Allah'.

It was only when deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin accused the party of sharing the same stand as opposition party DAP, that MCA appeared to back down from the issue.

chinese economic congress 140810 audience Chua however courted controversy soon after, when he took a dig at Umno and PAS for using religion to strengthen their influence over and gain support of the Malay-Muslim community.

And last weekend he raised eyebrows as well as the ire of many Umno politicians when he demanded for the gradual abolition of bumiputera affirmative action at the MCA-organised Chinese Economic Congress.

Several politicians, including usual suspect Perkasa president Ibrahim Ali, were quick to react and bay for his blood.

However, despite the show of bravura, many political analysts still say Chua has done too little too late to impress the Chinese community, and that his statements are merely political manoeuvring.

'No credibility'

Independent political analyst Khoo Kay Peng is unimpressed, saying that Chua is simply playing the populist game.

"At the end of the day, it's more on the issue of governance, and not politics. If the government does not abide by MCA's demands, will they issue an ultimatum and leave BN? They know they can't do that.

NONE" On the one hand (Ong) was a poor leader. But on the other, you have to agree that

what was done on the Port Klang Free Zone scandal was more meaningful. Chua is not doing anything on that front.

"He has no credibility," charged Khoo.

Khoo also scoffed at Chua's recent combative statements as "friendly fire" at his fellow component party leaders in Umno, calling them merely an "act".

"We all know that he has a lot of friends in Umno. The conservatives in Umno are also not too concerned because they know that at the end of the day, MCA can't pose any real threat.

"The threats from the Sabah or Sarawak parties are more real," said Khoo.

'Umno not really ruffled'

An Umno leader concurred, hinting that Chua's recent stance may be nothing more than "choreography".

"I don't think Umno will take much notice of him. Besides, he is saying what he needs to say for the time being. So we're just going to give him a chance lah," said the highly-placed party source.

The source also said that it would be a long shot for Chua's comments, no matter how acerbic, to drive a wedge into Umno-MCA relations.

"Given that MCA is in such a state, I think all he wants to do is to convince the Chinese constituents that MCA is still around.

gan ping sieu on sport betting 250610 02"Honestly, I don't think any discussion of Chua will even arise in the Umno supreme council meeting," he said.

However, MCA vice-president Gan Ping Sieu (left) defended his party president, saying that Chua has more liberty to express MCA's demands because he does not hold any cabinet position or public post, not even an MP.

"I am sure the MCA leaders' recent high-profile stand and remarks on public and community issues have caused discomfort to some, but that is what we set out to do.

"And we shall continue to champion issues in the overall national interest as a political party should do," he said.

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