

What shape should the 'New MCA' take?

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In a recent English daily was this headline, 'New MCA' seems to be striking the right note.' My mind straight away flashed back to the Feb 4, 1988 incident where the Kuala Lumpur High Court ruled Umno unlawful and gave birth to Umno Baru or 'New Umno'. Have I missed some recent dramatic changes in MCA? This party declared to represent the Malaysian Chinese in specific, and all other Malaysians, in general.

With the ill wind blowing around the globe asking 'Are political parties becoming obsolete?' I would like to take the readers back to the four basic functions of a political party in a democratic society.

First, a political party is expected to formulate new policies and develop new programmes which the party will take to Parliament for the government to implement. Second, the party listens to demands from the society and then packages them into policies to present to the government for adoption.

Third, the party recruits and selects the best brains for the government and the legislative for providing a responsible machinery for the nation. Fourth, a political party oversees the operation of the government.

We should not doubt MCA's ability in policy-making and bringing them to the Parliament. The current MCA leadership is represented by 10 Senators, 15 elected members of Parliament, four ministers in the cabinet, seven deputy ministers, 31 state assembly person and numerous state exco members and local councilors and heads of government agencies.

With this number of party leaders who are directly involved at decision-making levels, there should not be any reason not to expect the party to have thoroughly followed up on and gone through the government guidelines for policy review and development. These leaders, would have dutifully carried out individual responsibilities in the ministries and state governments and are familiar with the administrative processes.

The government would expect every new policy proposal to be grilled through the processes of problem identification and analysis, searching for options before leading to policy-crafting and drafting. The party should not miss, and there should be no excuse for missing, targets of the first function.

In another article on MCA earlier this year, I highlighted that the party had 191 divisions and 4,295 branches around the country except for Sarawak, each with its own set-up of Youth and Women wings.

Getting 50 members was all it took for a new branch to be set up. If these opportunities had been optimised and feedback collected religiously from the community, the government would have been up-to-date in meeting public sentiments and not be left to puzzle over why more than 25,000 Chinese in the country are still holding red identity cards.

If the above figure (25,000) is accurate, it will numerically work out to six Chinese red IC holders per MCA branch. It is indeed generous to give a time frame of six months for the special task force to find out why these poor souls have not been given citizenship: either by operation of law (Article 14 of the federal constitution), or by registration (Articles 15 and 16 of the federal constitution). Unless there are other reasons preventing effective

communications within the party.

On the third function of the party to ensure that the best brains are recommended to the government for filling the decision-making level positions in the administrative machinery in the country, has the age-old convention changed? Is the party president still having the final say in selection of these candidates?

Can members now have a say in wanting who to be nominated as their people's representatives? Can members select the candidate for division chairperson and also the national president? Have these processes been updated to meet new demands of the members in a progressive society?

If my memory does not fail me, under the previous regime, the present president was given the responsibility of setting up a machinery to oversee the government. The entire fourth function, or 25% of the party's responsibilities, rested squarely on his shoulders. The party had such high hopes on him. What were the scores on his report card?

I may be wrong to think that the daily's headline was nursed rather than resulting from logical evaluation of the current president's 100 days in office. However, the expectation of change in MCA is from the heart of every Malaysian Chinese. The last amendment to the party's constitution was indeed one big step to rejuvenate the party.

So, too, were the ethical guidelines on punctuality and demands on monthly activity reports. Directives to digitally network all the divisions and the adoption of new technology down to the town council levels were efforts which produced visible results. Also was the spectacular increase in awarding JPA scholarships to top-notch Chinese students.

If a 'New MCA' is in the making for the current regime, start with taking a cue from our honourable prime minister in that policies are crafted out of results of studies.

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