

**Machap - same lame and stale contest**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**March 30, 2007**  
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Some pundits have published their prognosis for the Machap by-election. Their verdict is similar - it is a foregone conclusion that the likely winner will be the Barisan Nasional. Malaysiakini writer James Wong argues that the vast resources of the ruling Barisan Nasional alone can overwhelm the DAP. He attributed the next cause of defeat to DAP's inability to manage its internal conflicts and to establish a positive working relationship with the opposition parties.

Others pointed to the lack of local issues which can be exploited by the DAP in this by-election. As a new village, Machap is seen as a MCA stronghold. The party would definitely like to claim credit from its contributions to the development of new villages in the country. Of course, the history of new villages can be traced back to the emergency period when the government had to battle the communist insurgency.

Consequently, they expected the DAP to harp on national issues and exploit the anti-establishment sentiments among segments of the Chinese community. An easy episode that can be used to stoke up the voters' sentiment would be the racist remarks made by certain Umno politicians at its general assembly last year. Other national issues such as corruption, the revival of the NEP, the lack of economic and employment opportunities and others are sure to reverberate in the opposition fiery speeches.

The analysts may have expressed the obvious. However, what is disappointing is the inability of the competing political parties to raise their game and to dish out a mature brand of politics. Instead what we are already witnessing in the run-up to the nomination and election dates is a dogged display of old developmental politics versus a blend of communal and issue-centric politicking.

Neither of them is offering any new hope to us in our nation's quest to become a first world nation by the year 2020. In our hope to become a first world thinking society, we need our politicians to play by the rule and to adopt more progressive and positive campaigns.

Days ago, the MCA president Ong Ka Ting was pictured laying bricks onto the framework of a new community hall in Machap. The party has highlighted a string of developments initiated and completed by the late Poh Ah Tiam who was the assemblyman of Machap. MCA is confident that his track record alone should be able to secure their candidate a simple victory.

In the coming days, I am sure more projects will be announced and more promises will be made to the voters of Machap to induce them to support the ruling coalition. It is without a doubt that the practice of developmental politics is an effective election tool.

However, one cannot be faulted for asking what new dimension has MCA brought into their political campaign if they continue to view Machap as a new village and nothing more? With the threat of communism long gone, we would have expected all new villages to be integrated with the other sections of the Malaysian society. Simply, there should not be a category called 'new villages' in our social vocabulary.

In order to better represent Chinese Malaysians, the MCA should shed its social welfare

mentality and starts to contemplate and strategise on how to integrate the Chinese community into the larger Malaysian social milieu that includes all communities. After 50 years of nation building, how many Chinese Malaysians feel that they are treated as full citizens of this country? In this context, perception is reality. What is MCA doing to help erase the migrant mentality still being adopted by many in the community?

Since the May 1969 incidence, the MCA has been on the defensive when they are scrutinised on their political role in BN. That is why, according to The Star's Wong Chun Wai, the DAP is likely to exploit the anti-establishment sentiments among sections of the Chinese Malaysian voters. This anti-establishment sentiment is a result of the perception among some Chinese Malaysians that they are second-class citizens in this country. Their perception is often strengthened by foolish and unnecessary racist remarks made by certain Umno politicians.

On this end, the DAP has not got out from its political mould either. By exploiting the anti-establishment sentiment, the party is probably trying to ignite a sense of communal victimisation amongst the Chinese Malaysian community and blame the MCA for not being able to protect and defend the community's rights. The tagline of 'MCA is weak against the might of Umno' may work to a certain degree. But what is the outcome that can be derived from this by-election that can help to move up the level of political maturity in this country? We will end up in the same vicious circle of developmental politics versus issue-centric politics.

Until and unless our politicians put more interest in nation building and change their political approach to take us into the right direction, it will be the same lame and stale contest that we will see in Machap.

The BN will claim a face saving win. The opposition will rejoice at having slashed the BN majority if they ever will and the folks in Machap will get newly tarred roads, a new community hall, funds for their local schools and will look forward to more goodies in the next general elections.

We, political pundits, will reuse our analytical template for the next general elections too because it will probably be the same story being retold.

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