

Can Ketuanan Melayu and 1Malaysia co-exist?
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MCA chief Chua Soi Lek's statements in the BN Convention may not win him much brownie points from other leaders, but reactions to it suggest that it has touched a raw nerve within the coalition.

More importantly, immediate rebukes from Umno leaders following the call to ban words like 'pendatang' (immigrant) and 'ketuanan Melayu' (Malay supremacy) has raised questions over the compatibility of such a concept within the coalition that is made up of mostly race-based parties.

NONEBut for BN and Umno secretary-general Tengku Adnan Mansor, the recent verbal spat between MCA and Umno leaders is "expected" as each party has to represent the views of their respective communities.

"Most of the parties are race-based and each party can say whatever they want to say. What Chua said was his view and the same was for the other side, Umno. But then we will be able to use our processes to come to a consensus," he said.

As such, he added the disagreement would not amount to a fissure in the coalition and is in fact quite negligible.

"It's a small thing and it's not the monster that the opposition and media like (Malaysiakini) make it out to be," said Tengku Adnan.

Chua slick to choose an unwinnable battle

But the refusal of several top BN leaders, including information chief and spokesperson Ahmad Maslan to comment indicate that the issue may be a hot political potato after all.

NONEEven often vocal Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin - who in his maiden speech as youth chief last year called for the term to be replaced in favour of Kepimpinan Melayu (Malay leadership) - preferred to toe the line.

"One of the main points of the consensus from the BN Convention is that we reduce inter-party quarrels and focus on servicing the rakyat," said Khairy.

He added that the skirmishes that also involve Umno vice-president and Home Minister Hishamuddin Hussein, Deputy Education Minister Puad Zarkashi and deputy chairman of the MCA publicity bureau Loh Seng Kong as a "prime example of wasting time and energy fighting each other".

NONEA waste of time or not, the verbal clashes, said UM political scientist Noor Sulastry Yurni Ahmad, does throw a poser over whether ketuanan Melayu can co-exist with Prime Minister and BN chairperson Najib Abdul Razak's promise of 1Malaysia.

And Chua and MCA are "slick" to use this dichotomy to prove MCA's relevance to the Chinese community.

"(Chua) uses 1Malaysia to say, 'You say that we are all the same, so why are Malays getting more benefits? In which parts are we equal?'," she said.

'Najib can't abandon ketuanan Melayu'

In any case, Noor Sulastry said that MCA is only able to take this argument further because there is widespread confusion over 1Malaysia, despite it being launched more than a year ago.

"People still need clarification; what sort of equality do you mean? People will come to their own conclusions because no one likes to spend time reading through the prime minister's blog," he said.

MCA may have made a big show of pushing this agenda, including through its members of parliament, but Noor Sulastry believed that nothing much may amount to it.

mca 140910 chua soi lek "Ketuanan Melayu and 1Malaysia just don't match... but Umno president Najib cannot run away from the Malay-centric rhetoric which we have seen at Umno general assemblies.

"Chua is slick to choose this unwinnable fight to make a show of standing up for his community," she said.

She added that no matter what Umno or MCA say, the fact remains that Umno is the anchor party and remains the most dominant within the ruling coalition because they bring in the most votes.

Until other component parties can challenge this, they will have to accept the role of a junior partner and the ketuanan Melayu that comes with it, she said.

On the flip side, she said, the timing of PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail in highlighting this matter was spot on, given the confusion over 1Malaysia.

But PKR leaders may still run the risk of losing Malay votes over this if they are not able to articulate their vision, she added, as this is an issue that strikes deep into the Malay psyche.

NONEThe decision to hit out on ketuanan Melayu, said PKR communications director Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, was deliberate so as to invite debate on the issue - and the tussle between Umno and MCA could not have come at a better time.

"This is something that is inevitable for their coalition of race-based parties. (In the past), Umno can say 1Malaysia when with its MIC and MCA friends, but say ketuanan Melayu among its members. In this open media environment, double speak is no longer possible.

"It is politically good for us as it creates a defining line between BN and Pakatan Rakyat, and it gives us room to explain and tell people about the realities of intra-Malay disparity, which questions the purpose of ketuanan Melayu," said Nik Nazmi.

'Playing up Malay credentials'

But with general polls looming, will PKR be able to convince the crucial Malay heartlanders that abandoning ketuanan Melayu does not translate to an act of betrayal?

"The initial onslaught from BN on this has been challenging, but never underestimate the people," said Nik Nazmi.

More importantly, he said Umno's move to "play up its Malay credentials" only serves to benefit Pakatan Rakyat parties, that all uphold the special position of Malays as per the constitution but are increasingly moving to the moderate centre.

The Seri Setia assemblyperson added that incidents like the furore over the use of the word Allah by Christians will continue to challenge BN and Najib's 1Malaysia speak.

"The problem with Najib is not his own rhetoric, but his actions, and the rhetoric and actions of those around him... The watering down of the NEM, for example, shows how powerful Umno warlords really are and the type of vested interests which exist within Umno and BN," he said.

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