

Why Chinese voters may abandon MCA
Malaysiakini.com
Mar 05, 2008
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analysis MCPX Political pundits touching base with one another during campaign rounds share a common anxiety and curiosity, as to whether the large turnout at opposition campaigns in cities and suburban areas will translate into votes against the Barisan Nasional (BN).

More importantly, they wonder if the MCA will take a beating by Chinese voters who make up a substantial number of urban voters at both parliamentary and state levels. There is a strong undercurrent of disgruntlement and disillusionment directed against the MCA led by Ong Ka Ting.

Even in the party rank-and-file, many are not satisfied with his reason for maintaining an 'elegant silence' over numerous controversies and challenging issues that are deemed to be detrimental to the interests and future of the community.

MCA is increasingly being criticised as a 'marginalised party' within BN, and seen as suffering from political impotence because of the hegemony of the Umno leadership and Malay supremacy.

Political observers are quick to compare the era helmed by Lee San Choon in the mid-1960s, Tan Koon Swan in the mid-1980s and Dr Ling Liong Sik in the 1990s.

While Lee was noted for his courageous public remark "Swim or sink with Chinese schools", Tan was popular for his charisma, political vision and unifying efforts in bringing dignity and respect to the party. Ling showed guts by taking a three-month leave of absence to protest discriminatory policies against the Chinese community.

Ong, the anointed successor to Ling, pales in comparison in both personality and leadership against the stature of his predecessors.

The community is both furious and disappointed with Ong, as reflected in commentaries in blogs and newspapers columns. For all his credentials and publicity stunts, he is being pilloried for his lack of political vision and being an errand-boy of the BN powers-that-be.

One blogger, a lawyer turned broadcast journalist, elaborated on the growing disenchantment: "The Chinese community is furious over the apparent silence of MCA when faced with a barrage of accusations from Umno over concerns of Chinese chauvinism."

Ong's favourite reply has been: "The MCA has its constraints because, on one hand, we have to safeguard the interests of the community, and on the other, we have to maintain racial harmony and national unity."

'Apologists for Umno'

Many Chinese voters are asking whether the MCA has walked the talk despite being given overwhelming support in the 2004 general election.

They have found party leaders wanting in expressing opinions or acting on such political issues as Umno hegemony and Malay supremacy, abrogation of democracy, impaired rule of law, pervasive racism, rampant corruption, abuse of power and mismanagement of resources at local city or municipal council level, religious intolerance, uncontrollable crime rate, runaway inflation and creeping 'Islamisation'.

In 2006, MCA felt the humiliation of its initiative backfiring when the Umno-led leadership demanded that the party should withdraw a collective memorandum calling for review of Article 121(1A).

An all-too-frequent question is why the party has to 'beg' for financial allocations for Chinese schools when, under the Federal Constitution, the community has the right to study its mother-tongue, including having schools built to cater for growing demand.

Those in the older generation from an English-educated and middle class background are questioning if the party is playing an effective and efficient role in protecting their legitimate rights, securing a better future for their children, ensure a level playing field in their deals with other communities, and inspiring them with a political vision.

Ong was also seen to have failed to protect the community's dignity when Umno Youth issued a blatant warning to MCA to cease its public campaign to declare Malaysia a secular state. Yet, the party president recently claimed that the MCA leadership is equal to the status of Umno leadership.

As a blogger wrote: "What is most disappointing is that some non-Umno politicians have become apologists for Umno. The MCA is merely a tool used by Umno to garner Chinese Malaysian votes."

Checks and balances

On Saturday, will the Chinese community vote in a stronger opposition to bring in the checks and balances that are so obviously missing within the BN fraternity? And, in the process, will MCA candidates feel the brunt of their anger?

The worst-case scenario, as the wind blows against BN and Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (Justice Bao as MCA calls him), the party is expected to lose five to seven parliamentary seats in addition to the nine lost in 2004.

Potential losses may include the parliamentary seats of Kota Melaka (Malacca), Serdang and Petaling Jaya Utara (Selangor).

In 2004, it lost nine - Seputeh, Cheras and Bukit Bintang (Kuala Lumpur); Ipoh Timor, Ipoh Barat and Batu Gajah (Perak); and Bukit Gelugor, Buklit Mertajam and Bagan (Penang). It had marginal wins in six seats.

At state level, MCA is expected to lose more than 14 contests - marginal seats mainly in Penang and Perak, as well as Bandar (Terengganu), Kesidang (Malacca), Kajang (Selangor), Lukut, Mambau and Rahang (Negeri Sembilan) and perhaps Tras (Pahang).

In 2004, the party had won 76 out of 90 state seats contested. In 17 straight fights for parliamentary seats - where Chinese exceeded 60 percent of voters - MCA took 8 seats compared to DAP's 9.

No one would be surprised if the DAP gains at MCA's expense once more.

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Source : <http://www.malysiakini.com/news/79176>