

Have mercy, MCA's plea to Kinta Valley folks
Malaysiakini.com
Mar 07, 2008
Andrew Ong

Ever since MCA secretary-general Ong Ka Chuan pleaded with Chinese voters to "show mercy" to the party, things have taken an interesting twist in the Kinta Valley.
MCPX

The hottest coffee shop topic now is no longer focused on how many seats can the opposition win, but how many seats will the MCA retain in the area.

ong ka ting pc 300805 ong ka chuan Ong is MCA Perak chief and naturally, he is leading the party's campaign to wrest back three seats - Ipoh Timor, Ipoh Barat and Batu Gajah - from DAP. Within these three parliamentary seats are nine state seats which MCA are contesting eight. Of the nine state seats, three seats are held by DAP, MCA five and Gerakan one.

Winning these densely Chinese populated seats are crucial for the MCA as it would reflect the party's relevance in championing the interest of the Chinese community which is generally showing anti-government sentiments.

Since nomination day, DAP have been capitalizing on such sentiments and been lashing out on national issues from inflation to corruption and attacking the MCA leadership and Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's administration.

The party has also been stressing that should BN retain their two-third majority in Parliament, it would allow them to perform a redelineation exercise of electoral boundaries that would decrease the number of non-Malay-majority seats.

Such issues appear to be well received by Kinta Valley folks which have attended DAP ceramah in huge numbers.

Sympathy votes

MCA leaders on the other hand are not defending their leaders nor Abdullah and his policies. In fact, posters featuring MCA's top brass and Abdullah are very hard to come by in the streets of Ipoh unlike in the 2004 general election.

There also appears to be no obvious attempt by the MCA to fend off DAP's accusations of bad governance, corruption and economic mismanagement.

Instead, MCA blames DAP's nearly four year term as parliamentarians in Ipoh Timor, Ipoh Barat and Batu Gajah for Ipoh's apparent economic downturn and proposes the party's nine-point economic plan as a solution.

The nine-point plan was launched with much fanfare right after nomination day and was touted as MCA's economic saving grace meant to prevent Kinta Valley from becoming an "old folks home".

A week later, Ong changed his tune and appealed for voters to "show mercy" and not allow MCA to "lose too badly".

"If you have five people in your household, I plead to you to give one vote to MCA. We need your support to serve the people and bring about development.

"In our last outing, we lost three Kinta Valley seats. I hope that this time it won't be so bad. We will fight for every vote until the last minute," he told reporters.

Prior to Ong's appeal, the party had gone to the ground with the message that the three DAP MPs had brought "nothing" to the constituencies and that MCA would be in a better position to "service" the constituents.

Different strategies

As part of their strategy to appeal for sympathy votes, MCA is also portraying the DAP as a disruptive and disrespectful party in the Chinese press.

maika holding shareholders meeting 300807 kulasegaran For example, yesterday MCA Ipoh Timor candidate Liew Mun Hon complained that a vehicle convoy of DAP supporters had rudely disrupted his ceramah on Tuesday night.

Ipoh Barat DAP candidate M Kulasegaran on the other hand is being portrayed by the MCA for being disrespectful to taxi drivers for repeatedly calling MCA's Bercham state seat candidate Gooi Seng Teik a teksi lou (cabbie in cantonese).

MCA is also dabbling on the race card, claiming that the community would suffer if MCA candidates are voted out in favour of DAP as the Chinese representation in government would be less.

At a hawker centre ceramah, Liew Mun Hon slammed the DAP for contesting in Chinese majority seats despite claiming Umno to be their enemy.

"Politics is like a dance stage. If there are 100 dancers and 99 of them are Malay, will they perform the lion dance or a Malay dance? We will never get to see what we want on stage," he warned voters.

The sudden switch in MCA's strategy has caught DAP off guard and the opposition party has been on the defensive this week in order to maintain their underdog status.

Even with Ong's appeal for "mercy", DAP candidates Lim Kit Siang (Ipoh Timor) and Fong Po Kuan (Batu Gajah) are expected to pull through. Kulasegaran's (Ipoh Barat) fate however is still too close to call.