

**MCA must face the inconvenient truth (Partt 1)**  
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**Foong Wai Fong**

analysis March 8, 2008 heralded a new beginning in Malaysian politics.

To find out whether or not it will be a good beginning, we will have to wait to see the sincerity, vision and strategy of various political leaders.

Analysis of the 12th general election results have revealed that the reasons why Barisan Nasional (BN) lost so heavily and the reasons why Pakatan Rakyat (PR) won so unexpectedly are very different.

barisan nasionalBN lost because of its arrogance, complacency, internal strife and a perception of rampant corruption. The opposition, though, was amazingly unified in its approach. The parties worked hard on the ground, kept up focus on issues that pained the people; and used communication technologies to drive home their messages.

BN will need time to accept its losses. Many in the component parties have yet to recover from the shock, while leaders are looking for scapegoats.

The MCA is being forced to face a most inconvenient truth - that its relevance as a party serving Chinese interest is now open to question. It won only 15 of the 40 parliamentary seats and 31 of the 90 state seats that its candidates contested.

In Penang, the biggest Chinese-populated state, MCA fell flat. In Selangor, Perak and Negri Sembilan, it suffered a tremendous setback. The party has relied on the strength of Umno's Malay-based support to win votes - but with Umno itself losing ground this time around, MCA's backbone collapsed. There is now groundswell of blame on Umno and its leadership.

Calls are being heard for MCA to examine its raison d'être. Former vice-president Dr Chua Soi Lek has asked: "What is the meaning of MCA's continued existence?" I feel the question would be more appropriately phrased as: "What is the value of MCA's continued existence?"

We can look at the question from two perspectives - that of Umno and the Chinese community.

chinese people community and economyThe question for Umno is: What is the value of MCA to BN if it can't deliver Chinese votes? In the face of PAS' and PKR's aggressive stance in taking away Malay votes, Chinese votes have become even more pivotal in securing Umno's position as the supreme political master.

What value can MCA bring to Umno if its base of support has shifted? Moreover to MCA, Umno is losing power as the majority partner in BN and also needs to get back on its feet.

In the Chinese community, meanwhile, some quarters feel that MCA has been long on promises and short on delivery. If non-Chinese based parties such as PAS and PKR can look after Chinese interests just as well, or even better, why would the community need MCA?

Sometimes when an issue is positioned as a Chinese one, it may make matters worse. So why should the Chinese voters continue to vote for MCA or any other Chinese-based party?

## **'Servant culture' in MCA**

MCA's predicament today is the result of decades of a 'servant culture' and its own role-confusion. The collective leadership seems to communicate the impression that the real boss is Umno and that the party represents the government, not Chinese interest.

mca agm 190807 abdullah badawi proudSome among the top leaders have unwisely allowed Umno to influence the settling of internal power arrangements, resulting in further loss of independence and self-esteem. The influence of MCA leaders in the cabinet and in government has been compromised, as seen in many cases of disrespect shown to MCA ministers over relevant issues over the past decades.

If you think like a servant, you act like one. Your responses are conditioned to cues from your master, and you surrender independence and sovereignty. MCA leaders have put themselves in this regrettable position, and hence have been perceived as ineffective in the eyes of the Chinese community. Perception is everything in politics.

Let's examine some of the most frequently raised criticism and defences of the MCA, as circulating in the community.

### 1. Keep us in government so that we can serve you

CA likes to remind the community to 'treasure' its ministers and representatives so that they can effectively safeguard Chinese interests in government; without MCA, it claims, there would be no Chinese voice. However, a high-profile MCA minister has admitted that the ministers are merely "Han officials in the Qing Dynasty" - meaning "our role at best can only be cosmetic, don't expect real results".

ting chew pehThe myth of MCA advancing Chinese interests through the government was debunked when the PR government in Perak agreed to grant permanent land titles to those holding Temporary Occupation Licences. MCA's Ting Chew Peh (photo), a former housing and local government minister, openly expressed shock that the PR government achieved this in less than 50 days of taking office, when MCA has been part of government for 50 years!

### 2. Doing 'side jobs'

Critics accuse MCA representatives of doing 'side jobs' instead of focusing on their main job of governing the country. The party appears to have given the impression that it has gotten its priorities backwards and that it is avoiding doing its main and real job. The community expects MCA to be a member of an effective government, formulating policies and implementing these effectively, speedily and efficiently. The government's role is to serve and help the people and not to compete with them.

MCA leaders have complained openly to the community that "we have done so much, but the Chinese don't appreciate it". There is a terrible gap in understanding here.

To the community, the issue of appreciation - or lack thereof - does not arise. As a YB - Yang Berkhimat - its elected representatives are voted in to serve and deliver. If they fail to do so, then they should resign and make way for others. Period.

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