

No end in sight to MCA-Gerakan rivalry

Malaysianmirror.com
13 September 2010

Both the MCA and Gerakan suffered massive defeats in the March 2008 general election. Hence, they should be helping each other to recover, but there seems to be no end to their rivalry, with each becoming more dissociated to the other.

After the 2008 elections, the MCA still holds 15 parliamentary seats and 31 state seats and is still stronger than Gerakan, which lost control of Penang. Also, the MCA has over a million members and many of its grassroots leaders are community leaders. No matter how bad the situation is, it still gets 20% to 30% of support.

However, the recent eight-month long party crisis has greatly weakened the MCA and tarnished its image. And the charge against its former president Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik has further worsened the situation.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek does not have much time to prepare for the next general election. Therefore, he suggested the "high profile" strategy. However, the strategy has faced many obstacles.

Umno leaders reminded the MCA not to stir up the "Allah" issue and Chua was called by the police to give his statement over remarks he made at the recent Chinese Economic Congress after the *Utusan Malaysia* had published news reports on it and Perkasa had lodged a police report.

Chua is trying to revive the party's prestige by using education issues. However, the commitment to fight for RM1 billion for Chinese primary schools under the 10th Malaysia Plan (10Plan) has not been honoured yet so far and it is not easy to fight for the recognition for the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC) either.

The UEC issue has highlighted the rivalry between the MCA and Gerakan.

When Gerakan president Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said that he does not agree that UEC students are required to get 4As in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) to qualify for enrolment into teachers training colleges, Chua said sarcastically that some leaders know only how to speak to the public but remain silent in the cabinet.

In this issue, Koh's stand is consistent with the wishes of the Chinese community.

In fact, Gerakan does not have any specific plan to brace up, including to regain control of Penang. Instead, there is a plan to for an extraordinary general meeting to decide on a vote for no confidence in Penang Gerakan chairman Datuk Dr Teng Hock Nan. It is going to make it more difficult to regain control of Penang.

However, Gerakan is lucky to have former key figure of the Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP), Sarawak State Industrial Development Minister Datuk Raymond Tan and Elopura state assembly member Au Kam Wah join the party, allowing it to have a foothold on Sabah. In addition, Sabah Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Peter Pang En Yin, who has quit the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), also intends to join Gerakan. The move will give Gerakan an influential foothold the Sabah BN.

As they are both Chinese-based political parties, there is a subtle relationship between Gerakan and the MCA. However, it does not mean that there is no room for the two parties to work together.

During the administration of Tan Sri Ong Kah Ting, the two parties had formed a joint committee. Although it is difficult for the two parties to merge, the move could prevent them from turning into enemies.

At that time, Ong Ka Ting worked closely with former Gerakan president Tun Dr Lim Keng Yaik, and they always shared similar stands in the cabinet and the BN supreme council.

The two parties should recognise the current political situation and together push the BN towards liberalisation and democracy. As long as the big political environment is changed, they should not worry about votes. Otherwise, if they refuse to cooperate, they will only meet more obstacles in the future.

Sin Chew Daily

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