



'MCA ALWAYS OPEN TO CRITICISM AND FEEDBACK'

NST-20/2/2007

Two out of three, or a little more than 60 per cent, of Malaysian Chinese may vote Opposition at the next general election. This, according to an opinion poll by the respected Merdeka Centre, may be a reaction to acrimonious political debate affecting the races last year. V. VASUDEVAN and DAVID YEOW speak to MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting.

Q: How do you see the Merdeka Centre's findings on where the Chinese vote may go at the next polls?

A: This poll was done at the end of 2006 and reflects to some extent the feelings on the ground at that time.

We had just gone through some political debate and certain controversial issues were raging and were reflected in the poll.

The MCA has never been complacent. We are always open to criticism and feedback.

Anything that can help to alert and create an improvement in ourselves, we are willing to look at to improve our position. I feel we cannot just reject everything that is not in our favour.

Q: What are you doing about it?

A: We will use it as a reference. We have to be honest about facing a situation which may be considered tough.

From there, we will have to work hard, strategise and go deeper into understanding the whole political atmosphere, find out what had made the respondents feel that way. We will face it and not brush it aside.

Q: One of the concerns of the Chinese is the sluggish economy.

A: The economy always forms a basic part of the people's perception of the government.

If the economy is doing well, and the economic factors are positive, and this leads to better affordability that will overcome the cost of living (which is being perceived to be high), then it will make a lot of people feel better.

The government has done a lot for the economy.

Q: Do you think conditions will improve before the next general election?

A: We have to be prepared for it. So I'm positive that from now on, improvements will be seen. It's just a question of how fast people will feel better than before. I'm quite sure our PM will know how to gauge the people's feelings.

Q: How prepared is MCA for the next election? Let's say if the PM calls for one next month, will the party be ready?

A: We have to be prepared. We have no excuse to say we are not prepared. I have always emphasised this to members at all our meetings.

Our preparation for the next general election started from Day 1 after the 2004 election. This means that we have not relaxed and have never slowed down.

So if there is an election, MCA is ready.

Q: Recently there was a controversy surrounding vice-president Datuk Dr Chua Soi Lek's statements on his relationship with your deputy, Datuk Seri Chan Kong Choy.

It gave the impression there was friction between the two.

(Dr Chua was said to have said that he enjoyed a "working relationship" with Chan but "a close and harmonious relationship" with Ong).

A: I don't think one simple statement can negate all the hard work and reality in the party.

The majority of MCA members will tell you that the party is united and everyone wants to see the party going in one direction.

To be fair to Dr Chua, I don't think that one sentence of "I have a working relationship" is something really bad.

And knowing Dr Chua, he is someone who speaks his mind, but he has never said anything bad about someone else.

And, of course, in politics it's really sensitive once it's out on the front page (of newspapers), people start to speculate.

The relationship among all MCA ministers is really good. There are no major differences. The style of doing things varies according to individuals. This applies to all parties.

Q: Do you expect the current team to remain unchanged at the next party elections?

A: All that will be decided by the grassroots through the democratic process. But I would say that our relationship remains strong and there is maturity there.