

## **Is MCA In Better Position To Face General Election?**

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**By Alan Ting**

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 26 (Bernama) -- Come Oct 2, the MCA will hold its 58th Annual General Meeting (AGM), an important general assembly to be attended by party members and delegates, before it heads towards the 13th General Election (GE).

No doubt, the second largest Barisan Nasional (BN) component is more stable and its leadership more focused on efforts to rebuild the party after two turbulent years, following the party's worst-ever performance in the last general election in 2008.

However, questions abound as to whether the MCA is really in a better position to face the next general election.

Party grassroots leaders such as Selangor MCA Public Complaints Bureau chairman Datuk Theng Book believes this is so.

He reasoned that people are generally satisfied that MCA is more stable and accommodating under current party president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek's leadership.

"So far, I have not met anyone complain about Dr Chua. They are quite OK, with the people saying he is capable. He has done his part, now it is up to the Chinese community to decide. I personally feel, under the current situation, when the party is facing internal and external threats, he (Dr Chua) is the best person to handle (such situations).

"We are not saying that under (Tan Sri) Ong Ka Ting, it was not okay. Under the current situation, Dr Chua is the best person to handle (whatever pressing issues) while the immediate past president (Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat) was more acting like the opposition," he said.

Ka Ting was MCA president from 2006 until October 2008 while Tee Keat was at the party helm from October 2008 until March last year before he was succeeded by Dr Chua, through a fresh party election to end the leadership crisis.

Theng Book said there was no logic to the notion that MCA would be wiped out in the next GE as the fact remained that opposition party DAP could not accept the more Islamisation approach taken by PAS, their partner in the opposition pact.

"If anyone says that MCA is going to close shop in the next election (GE), that person is either a supporter or member of the opposition party. If you look at what they have done, so far, in some states under their control, many people are also frustrated as they were given false hopes," he said.

Political analyst Dr Chin Yew Sing, who heads the Oriental Strategy Research centre, a think-tank under the Federation of Chinese Associations of Malaysia (Huazhong), also believed the party was in a better position to face the next GE.

He said MCA had become more aggressive and vocal in voicing out issues related to the

Chinese community.

"Whether it can be solved or not, is another matter, altogether. People know that issues can't be resolved overnight. Whether MCA is effective or not, also very much depends on how Barisan Nasional handles the issues. BN lost in 2008, not because of the opposition, but because of themselves," he said.

However, he said, MCA and BN were now seen to be working together to address some issues such as corruption, crimes and human rights issues, as well as funding for Chinese schools, as the government had introduced transformation plans.

Centre for Strategic Engagement (CENSE) co-founder Rita Sim said MCA appeared to be more stable under its "war time president" Dr Chua, who had come up with several good initiatives such as 1MCA medical fund and 1MCA scholarship, targeted at ordinary people.

"He works very hard on the ground. Whether it works or not, no one can be sure until the next general election. Certainly, if they (MCA) don't do anything, it would be even worse. MCA has wasted a lot of time due to the internal fighting," she said, adding that MCA's performance also depended on issues the voters faced near the election, as well as the mood of the voters at the time of the election.

However, Monash University political analyst Dr James Chin does not believe the MCA is in a better position to face the GE as the party still faced internal problems, but concealed the split by presenting a united front in the run-up to the GE.

"Although Dr Chua is seen to be moving on the ground and trying his best to revive the party, the bigger issue is how to select candidates for the general election. The split is still there.

"I believe the split will surface again when many are jockeying and lobbying for seats, closer to the election," he said.

Not only that, he said, MCA was facing difficulties to win back the tough urban constituencies which were known to be opposition strongholds as the party still suffered negative perception.

Meanwhile, (Rita) Sim pointed out the urban seats had always been difficult for MCA, but believed, should BN be able to improve the result even by a small margin, it would favour the coalition in the overall result.

"Even during the best years, the level of support for MCA in these seats was only between 35-38 per cent. During Pak Lah's (former prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) 'feel good' general election in 2004, the support even went below 30 per cent. Now, it is only about 20-25 per cent.

"If they (MCA) can get back between four and five per cent, the result will certainly be better as many seats were lost, with the majority of less than 2,000 votes. If you can cut opposition support by between four and five per cent in these constituencies, it could tip the balance," she said.

The focus is not just on the Chinese voters, but also on Indian and Malay voters as a little increase of support from these two groups would contribute to better results for BN.

Another analyst, Khaw Veon Szu, explained there was no political party that could consolidate its members 100 per cent.

"If you can get 60-70 per cent, it is considered very good as you can do a lot of things."

Nevertheless, there are some political analysts who believe MCA is not getting the right approach.

A Penang-based political analyst at the Han Chiang College, Datuk Chech See Kian, believes that MCA fights for party survival, instead of focusing on the people's aspirations.

"For example, when they said MCA leaders would not take up Cabinet posts if they lost in the next general election...this is not good. You have to tell the people that you want to do more, not just maintain the status-quo. MCA must change its strategy, to be more sincere and focus on the people. Put the people first, not the party," he reasoned.

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