

MCA to drop 30pc of lawmakers, expects revival in GE13
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 27 — The MCA is to drop at least one-third of its lawmakers in the next general election where president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek believes the party can gain more than the dismal 15 federal seats it kept in Election 2008.

The MCA president based his optimism on the belief that the Chinese community has returned to Barisan Nasional's (BN) fold. Most Chinese, who mainly live in urban areas, swung to the opposition in the last general election.

Dr Chua stressed it was imperative the party throws out its underperformers and fields new faces, pointing out that a more discerning Chinese electorate now pays more attention to the quality of the candidate, apart from the party he or she represents.

"I've already said — within the party there is no such thing as bargaining," the former health minister told The Malaysian Insider during an interview last week.

"It's not to say the old ones are being forced to go — they are told politely that they have to give way to the younger ones," he said.

But it is no secret that Dr Chua, who inherited a beleaguered MCA in 2009 after a fractious party election, has to work at breakneck speed to ensure his party survives the 13th general election, said to be drawing close.

The party president, who himself continues to be haunted by a scandalous past, is facing pressure from his BN partners, particularly the ruling Umno, to deliver the Chinese vote for the pact.

Since Election 2008, both parties have been at loggerheads numerous times as the MCA struggles to shake off talk of its subservience to Umno by demanding more slack for the Chinese community.

Despite its efforts, The Malaysian Insider understands that resentment remains in Umno's circles that the Chinese-based party would still have to rely heavily on Umno's supporters, the ethnic Malay voters, to win in most seats.

The MCA suffered its worst electoral performance in 2008 and was nearly wiped out of Parliament when its representation was slashed by half, from 31 to just 15 seats.

It performed no better in the statewide polls, clinching merely 31 seats. In Perak, the MCA's representation dwindled to just one state assembly seat.

In the series of by-elections held after Election 2008, BN and the MCA noticeably failed to clinch the Chinese vote. During the Sarawak state election last year, the Chinese community

flooded the ballot boxes with votes for the opposition, resulting in the DAP trouncing BN in a whopping 12 out of 15 seats.

But Dr Chua said the tide has likely changed and his party's unpublicised, internal surveys have proven it.

Voter confidence from among the Chinese community, he said, has increased towards both the MCA and the BN, buoyed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's inclusive and transformative policies.

"We have confidence that we will do better than the last general election.

"This confidence is based on the fact that we have done many studies, which we have never disclosed and the studies have shown that although the opposition may rubbish us, (but) the Chinese are all very pragmatic people... They know that while the BN is not a perfect government, including MCA, they also know that the alternative is not in any way better," he said.

The federal opposition of Pakatan Rakyat (PR), he added, was merely good at boasting its successes and basking in publicity.

"But they (the opposition) have the advantage of the fact that they are not in power... so people are aware that they can promise anything but they cannot deliver and in fact, they don't need to deliver," he said.

Dr Chua said the first study conducted by the MCA was in May 2009, shortly after he was first elected party president.

The nationwide survey, he said, returned dismal results on Chinese voter confidence towards the BN, with some states showing as low as 12 per cent in terms of the community's support.

But in May last year, Dr Chua said, the same survey returned promising results, even in opposition fortresses like Penang.

He said in some constituencies, particularly in BN's stronghold of Johor, voter support varied between a low of 15 per cent and a high of 50 per cent, depending on the candidate.

"I'm glad to say that it has gone up, Chinese support, even in Penang.

"But whether this support is strong enough to tilt the balance, we don't know... because they say in politics, one night is a long night," Dr Chua said.

Buoyed by the feel-good factor following PR de facto leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's sodomy acquittal and cash handouts from Budget 2012, it is widely expected that Najib will call for snap polls within months, ahead of his mandate expiring in 2013.

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