

**Soi Lek-Guan Eng debate not quite it, says analysts**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**February 19 , 2012**  
**By Yow Hong Chieh**

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 19 — The debate between the top leaders from MCA and DAP yesterday was a little more than a platform for political posturing by both sides, political analysts said.

Political scientist Ong Kian Ming said both MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek and DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng appeared less interested in talking about policy matters than fulfilling their own personal objectives during the hour-long event.

“Soi Lek wanted to show he could take Guan Eng on, while Guan Eng wanted to reach out to a wider audience beyond the Chinese community,” he told The Malaysian Insider.

The UCSI lecturer said Dr Chua missed out on an opportunity to talk about Barisan Nasional (BN) policies as the latter was “on the attack all the time” while Lim had similarly failed to focus on Pakatan Rakyat’s (PR) policy offerings.

Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) chief executive Wan Saiful Wan Jan said the debate, which was broadcast live on Astro, resembled two ceramahs held at the same time in the same place rather than an actual debate.

He said both Dr Chua and Lim seemed more keen on running each other down than answering questions from the floor or staying on the topic, “Chinese at the Crossroads: Is the Two-Party System Becoming a Two-Race System?”

Wan Saiful said the moderator, Tan Ah Chai, should have done a better job in shaping the debate by homing in on specific issues rather than give the debaters free reign.

“The audience was also a bit excited. They need to calm down and act like adults, not like schoolchildren cheering for their side every time a point’s made,” he said of the boisterous and sometimes disruptive crowd that had attended the event.

Merdeka Centre director Ibrahim Suffian said the format of the debate, which he described as “too loose”, had contributed to the event degenerating into a ceramah and also took Tan to task for not steering the debate back on-topic.

He pointed out that the debate had been put together more like a forum and said the organisers should have followed the “structured” format used in the 2008 debate between opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and then-information minister Datuk Seri Shabeery Cheek.

However, the pollster said it was natural to expect shortcomings from the debate as such events were not commonplace in Malaysia yet.

“It just shows we need more of these (debates),” he said.

The Malaysian Insider

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