

## **Lack of Chinese faces in Cabinet a non-issue, say groups**

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KUALA LUMPUR, May 12 — Several Chinese associations say they are not worried about the possibility of a Barisan Nasional (BN) Cabinet without a single Chinese face because in the country's new political landscape, any minister regardless of race must represent all Malaysians.

Despite BN winning last Sunday's general election, its component party MCA performed its worst in the party's history, prompting president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek to reiterate that party members would not take up any government posts as part of a pledge he would fulfill if the MCA failed to take more federal seats than it did in 2008.

"I leave it to the wisdom of BN to sort it out but I am not at all worried if there is no Chinese in government," Tan Yew Sing, president of the Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall (KLSCAH), told The Malaysian Insider.

Appealing to Malaysians not to look at the matter of representation so narrowly, he added: "I already see more and more that when we have problems we don't just go to our own race. Any race can represent all Malaysians and this country must move towards that."

Gerakan, the other mainly Chinese party in BN, also said it will not take up a Cabinet post but would consider state posts. It won only one federal seat and party president Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said yesterday he will step down this May 16.

Woo Ser Chai, chairman of the Petaling Jaya Federation of Chinese Associations and Communities, agreed and pointed out that MCA members had been in Cabinet for so many years but that the party had not met the expectations of the Chinese community.

"For MCA ministers, three collapsed losing by quite a big majority. Liow Tiong Lai won by very narrow votes. You can see that people are not so keen to vote MCA to be in the Cabinet," he said, referring to the former health minister.

Like Tan, he also said that the country had arrived at a "new concept" which it should continue to pursue.

"It doesn't mean that Malay ministers just fight for Malay interests, Chinese ministers fight for Chinese, and Indian ministers fight for Indian. Now should be if you are a minister, you are representing all races," Woo said.

Tan said he was confident that Chinese interests would not be sacrificed because even though MCA had also lost big in the 2008 election, the Chinese position has changed for the better due to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's various transformation programmes.

"There has been more allocation for SMJK and independent schools, support for many cultural functions of Chinese clans, an increase of non-bumiputera civil servants, and the allocation of more places in vocational institutions," he said.

Ong Chiow Chuen, chairman of the United Chinese School Teachers' Association (Jiao Zong), also said that it does not matter if MCA cannot represent the Chinese in Cabinet because

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak can appoint Chinese senators to government positions.

Only MPs and senators from the two houses of parliament are eligible to be appointed as a Cabinet minister.

Despite the hard fall MCA has taken in the past two general elections, Tan is sure that the party will be able to bounce back if they "cleanse" the party by culling its most ineffective and detrimental elements.

"I think the MCA should take their defeat in good faith and take away the people who are not really working for party and country," he said.

"This doesn't sound very good, but there are people who are like bullies in the local area, people who don't have recognised qualifications, and people who are not prepared to speak up on policy matters or speak their mind against extremists."

In this general election, the MCA won only seven parliamentary seats and 11 state seats out of the 37 parliamentary seats and 90 state seats it contested – less than half the federal seats it took in 2008.

All three association chiefs also dismissed BN's talk of a "Chinese tsunami" as the reason for its lacklustre results this election.

"There is no such thing. To us it is a urban-rural divide. To us it is a digital gap," Tan said.

"You can't say 'Chinese tsunami' because that is missing the whole point. It is barking up the wrong tree. The danger is that you will come up with a strategy to resolve this, but it will be the wrong strategy," he added.

"This doesn't match the 1 Malaysia concept," Ong said, adding that no group should be blamed because every citizen has a democratic right to choose and that the Chinese do not have to choose MCA.

They also slammed former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir's comments calling the Chinese "ungrateful", saying that the community was not obligated to vote for any one party.

"The essence of democracy is that people can vote for whoever they want. You cannot say that just because you can't get votes that people are ungrateful. It is ridiculous. Politicians serve the people. They are employed to serve the people," Tan said.

Woo also said that the BN government must take its win as a new lease of life and look into why the Chinese has overwhelmingly voted for the opposition this election.

"Just because the Chinese don't vote for them doesn't mean the Chinese don't like Malays," he said.

Contrary to what BN has said, analysts have attributed the coalition's lacklustre performance in Election 2013 not just to a Chinese swing towards Pakatan Rakyat (PR), but also because of a middle-class and urban exodus from the coalition.

BN took a severe beating this round and bled more seats at both the federal and state levels compared to 2008, leaving it with only 133 federal seats and 275 state seats, out of a total

of 222 and 505 respectively.

The ruling coalition also lost the popular vote to the opposition, winning just 48.6 per cent compared to PR's 51.4 per cent.

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