

BN's Chinese parties merger might be too late, too little, say analysts
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By Rita Jong

The planned merger between three Barisan Nasional component parties may not revive their fading political fortunes or win back the prized Chinese vote, said political analysts today.

They pointed out that the backlash against the MCA, Gerakan and SUPP by voters in GE13 was rooted in the antipathy towards the discredited Barisan Nasional coalition and subservience to Umno.

As such, it is the BN model that needs a makeover, instead of piece meal mergers between component parties.

The analysts were reacting to a statement by Gerakan's acting president Datuk Chang Ko Youn that his party, the MCA and SUPP will be holding talks soon to look into the possibility of merging. In GE13, Gerakan and SUPP won one parliamentary seat each while the MCA snared seven, the result of being rejected by non-Malay voters.

Political analyst Dr Lim Teck Ghee said the idea of the merger was "born out of desperation" and was their last attempt to remain politically relevant.

"However, merging is not the answer to what Chinese voters want from their parties. Voters want their parties who can stand up for their legitimate rights and speak out.

"The leaders of the three parties are also seen more interested in preserving their personal agenda and power," he said, adding that Chinese voters expected fair play and promises of equality to be kept.

"The latest controversy over the university education places shows how weak and incapable the three parties are in standing up for the young Chinese community's rights," he said.

He was referring to the number of top non-Malay students who were unable to obtain places in local universities to study medicine and other popular courses of study.

Merdeka Centre executive director Ibrahim Suffian believed that the three political parties may be able to assert themselves more forcefully within BN if the merger happened.

"However, this merger talk is coming rather late. The lack of support by the Chinese voters is not the objection by voters against MCA, SUPP and Gerakan alone," he said.

Instead, there has been a significant shift among voters and they have actually lost faith in BN as a whole.

"BN has to make the move to win back the support. Until and unless other component parties such as Umno can address the issue among the Chinese voters, it will be a bit tough for the individual component parties to win back support on their own," said the independent pollster.

Opposition politicians said that the merger is fraught with so many challenges that it is a

non-starter.

For a start, DAP's vice-chairman Teresa Kok said that the three parties had to contend with their different political philosophies.

"It would not be easy for these three parties to merge together. They have to answer to their respective grassroots on why do they want to merge," she said.

"How are they going to handle the party assets? Is MCA prepared to forgo their objective of fighting for the Chinese race alone and become a multi-racial party?"

"Who will be the President of this 'new party'? Chua Soi Lek? Peter Chin?" she wondered, referring to the current leaders of the MCA and SUPP.

DAP's strategist Dr Ong Kian Ming also believed that the merger talk is premature given that each political party has its own structure and outlook.

For example, MCA is a Chinese based party while the other two are multi-racial and count non-Chinese in their leadership structure. – July 21, 2013.

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