



by Charles Raj

LIKE most component parties in the Barisan Nasional (BN), the MCA seems to be contented with its performance in the recent general election.

Comments from its leaders suggest that as the second largest component party in the BN, the MCA contributed significantly to the coalition's record election victory.

Indeed, its leaders like to think that the protracted leadership struggle that plagued the party in recent years is now over and that it is business as usual.

Or is it? We do not want to spoil the party, but when the celebrations are over, the MCA would do well to critically examine an area of concern - why many of its candidates lost their Chinese majority constituencies.

It lost 23 seats - nine of the 40 Parliamentary seats and 14 of the 90 state seats it contested - mainly to the DAP.

Although its win this year amounts to a success rate of around 82%, it was still lower compared to the 1999 general election where it won 86% of its seats.

In the 1999 election, Umno fared badly, losing even Terengganu to PAS. But ironically, in 2004 when there was a swing back to the BN and Umno, the MCA fared worse.

What would have happened if many non-Chinese voters had not supported MCA candidates? This is something the MCA has to seriously examine.

For example, in the Klang Valley, it is pertinent to note that in several areas where non-Chinese voters were the majority such as in Bandar Tun Razak and Wangsa Maju, its candidates won. However, in areas where Chinese voters comprised the majority such as in Bukit Bintang, Seputeh and Cheras, it lost.

In the Kinta Valley, the DAP won in Ipoh Barat and Ipoh Timur. In Batu Gajah, it even ousted Perak MCA chief and the MCA president's brother Datuk Ong Ka Chuan.

Post-Election Challenge

MCA's election win may need to be examined.

It is also interesting to note that several key MCA leaders won in areas where non-Chinese voters comprised the majority. They are its President Datuk Ong Ka Ting (Tanjung Piai), Deputy President Datuk Chan Kong Choy (Selayang), Vice-President Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn (Alor Gajah), Youth Chief Datuk Ong Tee Kiat (Pandan) and Wanita Chief Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen (Raub). Several of its state chiefs also won in non-Chinese majority seats.

The immediate challenge for the MCA is to address this issue. Why is it that it can win in some Chinese majority seats such as Kota Melaka, Ayer Keroh, PJ Utara, Serdang, Nilai, Rasah and Rahang and not others?

It needs to win back the support of the Chinese if its candidates are to win comfortably in the future in Chinese majority areas. We hope that this election results do not indicate that the Team A and B rift has yet to heal completely.

If this is so, then the party's decision to drop Vice-President Datuk Chua Jui Meng from the Cabinet may widen the rift by reopening old wounds.

It is a good thing Chua was not dropped as a candidate, as otherwise the MCA might have lost more Chinese votes. Another bone

of contention is the failure of Perlis MCA Chief Datuk Chor Chee Heung to be elevated to a full minister, resulting in him declining a deputy minister's post.

And then you have the secretary-general's position. Certain quarters are trying to persuade Tan Sri Ting Chew Peh to make way for the newly appointed Health Minister Datuk Chua Soi Lek.

The latest setback for the party is the revelation that several of its members, including a top official from Labuan, are linked to crime.

The good news for the MCA is that the DAP too, is facing some problems of its own. Its Secretary-General Kerk Kim Hock was defeated in Kota Melaka and has submitted his resignation amid allegations that Lim Guan Eng, son of DAP Chairman Lim Kit Siang, campaigned against him.

But the bickering in the DAP is little consolation for the MCA. The MCA leadership has to tread carefully in the next five years. It would otherwise be difficult for the party to win the 23 seats it lost in the 2004 election.

It cannot always depend on its fellow BN supporters and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's popularity to see its candidates through. **mb**