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Ling must stay the course

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THEN the MCA was split and demoralised. Dr Ling Liong Sik has put all that behind. Now, in the words of a colleague, The Star's columnist V.K. Chin, an insider in Malaysian Chinese politics, MCA is a stable organisation. He adds: "The party has never been as rich as it is at the moment.

"Income from investments (including the profitable Star) is more than sufficient to carry out its numerous activities."

I could not agree more. Tengku Abdul Rahman College and the party's Langkawi project for education are the envy of many component parties within the Barisan Nasional.

Dr Ling has got his priorities right. He put the party in order and on the right path, got the right people into it, built the right spirit, and by and large has left the MCA to get on with it.

Still, in politics as in other professions, there were bound to be persons who were and are not happy with anything Dr Ling has done, achieved or is doing.

What surprised me most is that the criticism came from the political spectrum within the MCA which I had least expected.

Perhaps, the four years I spent at the United Nations in New York had put me out of touch with the internal politics of the MCA.

Not even Dr Ling's enemies, in and outside the MCA, can deny that he had inherited a weak MCA.

But then, Umno was also divided following Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah's leadership struggle against the Prime Minister and president of Umno, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

There were splits in the Umno ranks. Unknown to many at that time, Umno was going through a profound rethinking about its political agenda.

It is now doing that all over again to recover lost ground and to stamp out with grit "money politics" and forces which are subverting the Malays and Muslims.

Their leaders are bent on destroying the Malay body politic to achieve their ultimate goal - a scrupulously theocratic Islamic nation in a multi-religious and cultural Malaysia.

Comparing Dr Mahathir with Dr Ling is not right, besides being odious, as I will not be entirely fair to either.

I will instead draw your attention to one similarity which has been underplayed.

Although the political situations under which they had to cope as leaders of the nation's two major communal parties were and are different, they always put the interests of the nation above themselves and the communities they lead.

The Bumiputeras appear to have an edge over the Malaysian Chinese in politics, but in the economy the comparison is between a giant and a weak dwarf.

Both Dr Mahathir and Dr Ling are strong personalities who dominate their local political scenes, albeit being the Prime Minister Dr Mahathir also dominates the national political landscape.

Of course, they face different problems and each tries to solve it differently within accepted limits.

A non-Chinese official who once worked for Dr Ling said this to me over drinks at the Lake Club last Friday evening: "Dr Ling knows his limits ... his parameters. He knows what he can and cannot do. He is a pragmatic man.

"Besides, he is as good as any Chinese who can be a true Malaysian."

Dr Ling - rightly or wrongly - is perceived as a practical MCA leader who will not pander to too blatant Chinese chauvinism because according to a Chinese intellectual, a well-known name who talked to me on the basis of anonymity: "Dr Ling's basic instinct is to think like a Malaysian first although he leads an ethnic-based party.

"The well-being of the nation, peace, stability and the maintenance of race relations and good feelings among component parties, certainly with Umno, are paramount to him."

Indeed, I venture to say, Dr Ling's basic instinct should be shared by any sane Malaysian of any race.

Even after 43 years of independence, the racial situation, though very good, is ultra-sensitive.

However, there always exists the perceived threat of an eruption, as had happened in Indonesia.

The threat will only be reduced if each racial group observes scrupulously the ground rules of the Barisan Nasional, and by observing meticulously the provisions of the Federal Constitution.

The Umno-MCA relations are the core of the Sino-Malay relations which will determine peace, stability and prosperity in the nation.

Dr Ling has been one of the key personalities in this sustainable racial harmony.

I sincerely urge him not to quit because he not only has 14 years of high level experience in government, but is also among the few in the racial divide with refreshingly new views on the vital Sino-Malay partnership.

"They (and the person names names) should not put pressure on Dr Ling to pass the buck to Dr Mahathir, though I know it would take a lot more to destabilise the Barisan Nasional than Dr Ling's resignation," said an expert on Chinese politics, herself a Chinese.

But then why risk it, especially when what at first was simply a personal matter has been unfairly and highly politicised.

Dr Ling is now on holiday in Perth, and I know what he likes best when he is Down Under.

Enjoy the vacation, then come back rejuvenated to carry on the good job he has been doing at the Ministry of Transport.

The whole nation wants Dr Ling to stay the course until the next general election, or at least when his term as president of the MCA expires.

MCA, the party at the centre of media interest, was established in 1949 with an avowed aim of cooperating with the then British colonial government to fight the communists and later in 1952, with a strongly stated affirmation to work together with Umno to fight for Merdeka (independence).

The alliance between Umno and MCA has been fruitful for both.

What is needed now is a good and conscientious national plan of some vision, in addition to Vision 2020, in which the writer feels may lie the secret to reduce, if not to entirely get away from the communalism of Malaysian politics.

Dr Ling's contributions have been recognised, accepted and applauded by all Malaysians.

He therefore must reciprocate this overwhelming support by staying the course.

The alternative is bad for the MCA. The Chinese will lose a seat in the front bench, and by extension the community's political clout.

Ignore those between "15 and 20 per cent dissidents". Let them continue to fire from the chips on their shoulders. They will soon enough learn that they only accentuate the negative.

Dr Ling has blown their amateurish cover.
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