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Team B leaders ready to scratch and bite back to gain support

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THE background music was from the blockbuster movie Once Upon A Time in China, in which Jet Li played the role of Wong Fei Hung (1847-1924), a martial arts master.

It was obvious the choice of music to serenade the MCA Team B leaders on stage was not by chance but by design.

After all, Wong, known as one of the 10 Tigers of Canton, represents a hero of valour, courage, selflessness and, most of all, sacrificing himself to defend the weak and the oppressed.

The atmosphere and setting were set for MCA deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek and the rest of the Team B leaders to rise to the occasion.

He did not fail the audience when he announced his preparedness to make a comeback.

His analogy, that "a retired life guard will not hesitate to save someone from drowning", justified his decision and the reason for the gathering, the first of a nationwide roadshow.

The 26,000 crowd who paid for their dinner held at Bandar Springhill near Port Dickson was equally impressive, enough to bring representatives of the Malaysian Book of Records to document the achievement.

But the question that arises from all this is, what was the whole episode all about?

"We have the support of the MCA and Chinese grassroots. They are fed-up with all the manoeuvrings by Team A whom they feel are only keen to hold on to power at the expense of the community's interests," said one of Team B's leaders present.

Asked whether the move would be viewed as going against the peace plan outlined by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, he argued that Team A had reneged on the plan.

"They agreed to the status quo. Look at the manner in which they removed Ah Lek as the disciplinary committee chairman," he said, adding that he chose to be anonymous as Team A leaders may just discipline him since they had installed their men as disciplinary committee members.

He went on to vent his frustration on Team A, listing other examples, including the appointment of Alor Star MP Datuk Chor Chee Heung to head the party in Perlis and bypassing Perlis State Exco member Loh Yoon Foo.

"(MCA vice president) Datuk Chan Kong Choy, who is the incumbent Selangor MCA deputy chairman, was purposely sidelined from being the State chairman and instead, (Datuk Seri) Ong Ka Ting, who is an MP from Johor, was preferred.

"Similarly in the case of Johor. Datuk Chua Soi Lek was made the State chairman and overlooked was the most senior vice-president Datuk Chua Jui Meng, who is an MP from the State."

The list did not stop there as the Team B leader listed names of young councillors from his faction who were axed as municipal councillors.

It was obvious that a sense of being isolated and victimised prevailed among all Team B leaders that night.

They, however, took comfort from the massive turnout that night, giving them the capital to claim that they did have the support of the masses.

Jui Meng described his sentiments about the show of support quite succinctly: "Look at the miles and miles of smiles."

However, political pundits would say that numbers do not count. It is rather the way incumbents wield the power they have that determines who

survives the political battle.

It is a fact acknowledged by deputy president Lim, but, he said: "The voice of the grassroots MCA members will prevail and their aspirations met."

Kong Choy, who seemed to be popular with the crowd and viewed as Ah Lek's anointed successor, did not mince his words when he openly declared that the MCA needed changes in the leadership.

Taking advantage of the atmosphere, Kong Choy said: "Leaders must have grassroots support. Without that, it is as good as a building without foundation."

Looking at the whole episode, it was obvious that Team B was out to prove to the Chinese that it matches Team A, led by MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, in all departments.

Said an observer at the function: "In Ah Lek, Team B has an equal if not better leader than Dr Ling. If Ka Ting is Dr Ling's anointed successor, Ah Lek has an excellent orator and successor in Kong Choy.

"Then there is Jui Meng, who is smooth and articulate.

"In Serdang and Mentakab MPs Datuk Yap Pian Hon and Datuk Fu Ah Kiow, they have staunch party men who know the aspirations of the grassroots."

With that, the observer said, Team B was as good as what Team A had to offer.

"Now, with the strong grassroots support, why should Team B leaders be ignored and sidelined by Team A?" he said.

In short, the function was indeed a signal to Team A that Team B was not about to take everything lying down and it was coming back fighting.

The next question is, where does Team B want to take the matter to?

Ah Lek believed that there was a need to explain the matter to the grassroots directly and the holding of such event was the best way possible.

Said a supporter of Ah Lek: "Team A has an English newspaper and two Chinese language dailies to present their views.

"We have nothing. This is our only avenue to inform the grassroots of what has been happening in the MCA and how the the party's name has been dragged through the mud by some selfish leaders."

But an observer commented, after all was said and done, the function was a Team B show all the way.

"The next stage will be whether Team A will prepare their own show of strength. Probably they won't and let Team B do all the talking and finally becoming just another voice in the wilderness.

"After all, there is not going to be any party election for the next three years.

"Will Team B have the stamina to pursue their cause until then?"

By the way, the backdrop on stage displayed the faces of Team B leaders with a slogan: "Revitalised and Marching Forward".

More telling were the faces. They may never be Wong Fei Hung or any of the 10 Tigers of Canton, but there is no doubt they are crouching tigers ready to scratch and bite.