

10/03/2002

Deceit, deception and claims of fraud

Chow Kum Hor

SEVEN years ago, a son of Lukut Assemblyman Datuk Dr Yeow Chai Thiam's close friend was diagnosed with cancer and was given only six months to live.

Worse, the patient refused surgery and this left Dr Yeow deeply worried.

The soft-spoken Dr Yeow then made a vow that if the patient agreed to a surgery and if the operation succeeded, Dr Yeow would spend one week in a Buddhist temple meditating and observing strict religious rituals.

The Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia-trained doctor also made another vow that if the patient survived more than five years, Dr Yeow would spend another two weeks in a temple.

In fact, the vegetarian Dr Yeow, 49, was so determined in wanting the cancer victim to recover, he even pledged to the Buddha that he was willing to exchange his Negri Sembilan Executive Council post for the man's health.

The cancer victim finally agreed to a surgery and is today a healthy man. Dr Yeow, also known as woh seong (monk in Cantonese), has fulfilled both vows of religious sojourns in a temple.

As for the exco post vow, it would be up to fate to decide how long more Dr Yeow would keep his State Local Government and Housing committee chairmanship.

Of late, Dr Yeow who is an MCA central committee member, has been facing a series of problems from within and outside MCA, leading to speculations about his political future.

The latest to haunt him was the over 3,000 phantom members allegedly found in the MCA Rasah division headed by him.

It is learnt that the move was part of a conspiracy to kill Dr Yeow's political career.

Following this, his political allegiance has been questioned. Prior to this, Dr Yeow was part of the 32 Team A central committee members.

The speculations first surfaced when Dr Yeow and his supporters showed up at a Chinese New Year open house hosted by vice-president Datuk Chua Jui Meng of Team B, about three weeks ago.

Dr Yeow was also part of the faction's delegation to the Prime Minister's office last Tuesday.

Five of the eight-member delegation held discussions with Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad then.

On Friday, Rasah vice-chairman Datuk Lee Yuen Fong confirmed that he, Dr Yeow and Negri Sembilan Youth head Yip Chee Keong had defected to Team B. Dr Yeow is in Taiwan and cannot be reached for comments.

Incidentally, Lee, or Tiger Lee as he is known, is no stranger to camp-switching, having defected to the MCA months after winning the Temiang State seat on a DAP ticket in the 1995 general election.

"In politics, there is no Akujanji. It is all about survival," said an MCA-watcher, referring to the pledge of loyalty signed by top Government officials, including the Cabinet.

But as Dr Yeow's open support for Team B appear imminent, questions linger on how it would alter the balance of power in the run-up to the triennial party polls starting March 30.

Based on the last membership list, Negri Sembilan sends about 100 delegates to the general assembly. The number is small compared to Selangor or Johor but psychologically, it was a booster for Team B.

"That is a morale booster. Prior to this, it is widely believed that if there were any defections in the central committee, it would be from Team B to Team A. Not the other way round," a Selangor division leader said.

An aide to Dr Ling said the defections happened in only one State and Dr Yeow's dissatisfaction stemmed from not being appointed State MCA chairman, currently held by Datuk Wong See Wah. Dr Yeow is the State party number two.

As Team A dismissed the episode in Negri Sembilan as an isolated case, Team B appears confident that more defections are forthcoming, especially in Penang, Johor and Perak.

Dr Ling's supporters have dismissed such talks as "illogical" considering the dissenting faction does not have the edge that comes with incumbency.

However, Team B maintains that if a presidential stronghold like Negri Sembilan can be infiltrated, it will not be impossible to do the same elsewhere.

Dr Ling used to face the least resistant from within MCA there.

Whether more defections - from either camps - will take place, disagreements are likely to be more serious within Team A members than Team B.

Party insiders say the competition for patronage and positions within Team A is stiff.

"Take Negri Sembilan. There are nine assemblymen, all previously supporters of the president, and only two exco posts and one State chairmanship to go around.

"Surely some feel it is their turn for the posts but do not get it. When such discord takes place, some would rather jump camp," a State leader there admitted.

At the national-level, sources said supporters of Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting are not too comfortable with the perceived threat of Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn.

Both are Team A vice-presidents with Fong finishing top in the vice-presidential race in the 1999 election, while Ong is seen as Dr Ling's protege.

On the other hand, Team B, hardly able to offer any "goodies" to its supporters, is seen to be more cohesive though it is also not spared intra-faction rivalry.

Some problems may arise between Chua and fellow Team B vice-president Datuk Chan Kong Choy when it comes to deciding who to contest for which post in June.

As a journalist quipped, the Team A-Team B split has evolved into the "chicken egg grade" factionalism: Teams A1, A2, B1, B2 and so forth.

"To be fair, Dr Ling has a tight reign on his supporters at the national level. If he makes a decision favouring Ka Ting, Fong would have to support it.

"It is at the state-level that Dr Ling may face some intra-faction rivalry. States are harder to control," a Team B sympathiser from Selangor said.

Besides Negri Sembilan, there are also signs that some Penang Team A leaders are set to defect but it is unclear if, or by how much, it would tilt the electoral outcome at all levels.

A senior Team B member has this to say: "A war is not won on getting the other side to defect."

But such defections and intra-group rivalry will see more room for surprises in an escalating MCA war already fraught with deceit, deception and allegations of fraud.

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