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Picture of former president Chong Eu may find its rightful place in MCA HQ

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The missing photograph of Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu, MCA's second president, at its headquarters here is symbolic of the historical baggage which will hang heavy on the proposed merger talks between the party and Gerakan.

Dr Lim became MCA president in 1958 but left 16 months later after leadership differences.

In 1968, he cofounded Gerakan with Tan Sri Dr Tan Chee Khoon, Datuk Professor Syed Hussein Alattas and Professor Wang Gungwu.

In the watershed 1969 general election - which culminated in the May 13 riots - Gerakan wrested the only Chief Ministerial post the MCA has ever held. The Penang Chief Minister's post has since remained with Gerakan.

That has remained a major bone of contention between both parties and almost blew up into a major political controversy shortly after the 1999 general election when two winning Gerakan assemblymen crossed over to MCA.

MCA, claiming numerical superiority over Gerakan, actively sought to get the Chief Minister's post. The issue was resolved after the intervention of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his successor, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

In the line-up of photographs of past and present MCA presidents in Wisma MCA here, Dr Lim's photograph is the only one missing.

The photographs of the other five past presidents - Tun Tan Cheng Lock (1949-1958), Tun Tan Siew Sin (1961-1974), Tan Sri Lee San Choon (1974-1983), Tan Koon Swan (1985-1986) and Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik (1986-2003) and the incumbent, Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, are prominently displayed.

Dr Lim's photograph was never put on display since Wisma MCA first opened in 1981. Nor was it displayed at the old party headquarters.

Last month, the MCA and Gerakan, in what took many by surprise, announced that they were seriously considering a merger.

So will the photograph of the second president be put back in its rightful place between Tun Tan Cheng Lock and Tun Tan Siew Sin?

MCA chief administrative director Datuk Wong See Wah, who is in charge of the day-to-day running of Wisma MCA, did not want to comment on the missing photograph. Neither did Penang MCA chairman Wong Kam Hoong.

Perhaps if the merger does take place, Dr Lim's photograph will find its rightful place in the MCA presidential photo gallery.