

MCA - three strikes and you're out!

MalaysiaKini.com

April 8, 2013

By K Temoc

After the 1969 general election the late Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman, then deputy prime minister, was known to have said, "MCA dan MIC nampaknya tidak mahu hidup dan tidak mahu pula mati", using a Malay idiom 'hidup segan, mati tak mahu' (figuratively 'neither alive nor dead') to sneeringly describe a virtually political-defunct Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA). MCA had then been dealt its first strike in the game of politics.

Undoubtedly May 1969 was a bad time for the MCA, losing in disastrous measures to a loose coalition of the (original) Gerakan Party, a then very new Democratic Action Party (DAP), the People's Progressive Party (PPP) (then under the Seenivasagam brothers), and even Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS).

But embarrassing as it was for MCA, it wasn't its worst moment yet, because successes and failures are part and parcel of politics, and while depressing, we expected the MCA to pick itself up again. And it did.

In 1985, during the acrimonious dispute for the party's presidential post between Tan Koon Swan and Neo Yee Pan, MCA disgraced itself in no uncertain terms by having the then deputy prime minister, the late Ghafar Baba and a Malay, occupied the MCA's top position to moderate a settlement between the two Chinese contenders.

That incident would not have been disgracefully controversial if the MCA had been a multiracial political party. That it was, and still is, a Chinese race-based party, in having a Malay as its head, no matter how temporary it had been, was certainly a dubious Malaysian first, an utterly shameful indictment on MCA's inability to represent itself, let alone the Chinese community.

That was the second strike against MCA.

March 2008 was merely a repeat of May 1969. As George Santayana said: "Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them", and did the MCA?

As Stanley Koh, a former MCA member said, the party had done nothing to promote the democratic process but instead supported Umno in the latter's numerous constitutional amendments to legalise and perpetuate unjust and undemocratic processes, including harboring a questionable electoral system.

As an observer I would like to add that MCA has shamed and angered many Chinese Malaysians more than once because of its silent cringe when Umno issued policies disadvantageous or hurtful to Chinese.

As if its usual in-fighting driven by individuals' interests, drive for power, avarice and

Machiavellian backstabbing weren't enough, it now has de facto abdicated its claim to representing the Chinese community. MCA is repeating its shame of 1985 by calling upon and relying on a Malay to defend its Chinese-majority stronghold of Gelang Patah in Johor.

The Chinese community have been urging Chua Soi Lek to stand in Gelang Patah against DAP's Lim Kit Siang in the final fight at the Chinese OK Corral in the way former MCA president Lee San Choon had done in 1982 in Seremban. But all their cries have fallen on Chua's deaf ears, as had been the case on other political issues affecting Chinese interests.

MCA's finest hour

Thirty years ago Lee San Choon had accepted a dare by Lim Kit Siang to contest in a Chinese majority constituency, and chose a DAP's hor siew (Chinese for tiger's lair, meaning stronghold) in the federal constituency of Seremban. Lee won and so did MCA in 24 out of 28 allocated parliamentary seats and 55 out of 62 state seats. It was MCA's finest hour, but not realising it was its last hurrah.

Lee San Choon then left almost immediately after his election victory because of differences with Dr Mahathir Mohamad, then the president of Umno, not unlike what Lim Chong Eu did when he, as president of MCA, disagreed with Tunku Abdul Rahman.

The perverse thing about the Gelang Patah challenge is that the constituency is not only a Chinese majority seat but a truly MCA hor siew (stronghold). Yet Chua Soi Lek shrank from direct competition with Lim Kit Siang in an election battle which will show who Johoreans in that constituency believe in and support.

In Chua Soi Lek's refusal to contest Lim, he has effectively announced to the world that the president of the Malaysian Chinese Association and thus the MCA don't enjoy the confidence and political support of Chinese Malaysians. That was MCA's obituary, courtesy of its party president Chua Soi Lek.

Instead of doing a Lee San Choon, Chua Soi Lek is instead doing a Ghafar Baba by imposing on, perhaps even imploring upon Abdul Ghani Othman, the current Johor menteri besar, to stand in the MCA seat against Lim Kit Siang.

In fact, I dare say it's a MCA disgrace far worse than the 1985 leadership debacle, because today Chua Soi Lek cannot claim the MCA in Gelang Patah is caught in an acrimonious leadership struggle and requires only a non-Chinese to step in to help. What the MCA in Gelang Patah is actually suffering from is a total lack of top leadership, full stop!

MCA, your president has delivered your third strike, and as the game says, three strikes and you're out.

But does this mean Chua Soi Lek in his unwillingness to square off with his principal nemesis, is eyeing another 'safe' seat for himself. If he is, he ought to consider how his already tainted personal reputation could affect his party, the party that's supposed to

represent Chinese Malaysians. But I suppose such considerations for party interests would be too far above his thinking.

It's lamentable that Chua refuses to take on Lim Kit Siang in Gelang Patah in what could have been a show of morale-boosting confidence for BN in general and MCA in particular. If he wins like Lee San Choon he will be a hero; if he loses he will at least go down in glory, not unlike the medieval samurai warriors who were even prepared to commit seppuku for their personal honour.

Visualise a Chua Soi Lek preparing for his final battle in Gelang Patah knowing he will probably lose (I know it's difficult but let's try anyway). He drinks three cups of wine as gestures of apology to his god(s), family and especially to the Chinese community for the sins of MCA, and pens his final political poem a la the 5-7-5 syllable haiku:

In our summer of glory
Hibiscus flowers once bloomed for my people
They now wither equally well

But alas, Chua has effectively Paraquat-ed his hibiscus plant by clinging on to the hem of an Umno man's sarung.

Pathetic begging

You know, Donald Lim, the MCA chief in Selangor, had recently begged Selangoreans to help his party avoid total political devastation, in a similar shameful appeal (or begging) as Ong Ka Chuan had done in Perak prior to the 2008 general election.

There is a two-word Penang Hokkien retort to such pathetic begging, hor kh'or, which in the context of MCA's poor performance can be interpreted as: What and why did MCA do or neglect to do to come to such a state of beggarly imploring to the voters?

The moral of that two Penang Hokkien words is that MCA could have avoided such shameful begging if it had exercised its principles, righteousness and courage as the claimed leading representative of the Chinese Malaysia community. Well, it's now too little, too late!

And what about the new Ghafar Baba that MCA has pushed forward to stand against Lim Kit Siang?

There has been incorrect posturing of Abdul Ghani Othman as a courageous and well-liked person among Chinese because of his so-called moderate politics and humble self.

Firstly, there's nothing courageous about his candidature. Abdul Ghani in the Umno scheme of things is already expendable cannon fodder to make way for Umno's new rising stars in Johor. Without involving mention of the palace, every political observer knows Najib Abdul Razak wants a corps of younger Umno technocrats to run Johor and the all-important Iskandar Project. He already has in mind a younger Umno man to replace Abdul Ghani.

I dare say Abdul Ghani is being 'volunteered' [grin] by his no doubt smirking Umno colleagues. If he wins by the grace of Allah swt and of course more mundane 'forces' [a nudge and a wink], they will of course claim credit and pat him on his back. If he loses they will hail his perwira spirit, give him a golden handshake and put him out to pasture.

But I want everyone to recall late 2006, a mere 6.5 years ago when Abdul Ghani Othman rejected the concept of Bangsa Malaysia as totally unacceptable because he openly stated that a national unified identity was a threat to his cherished Ketuanan Melayu, or Malay supremacy. He saw the vital importance of continuing Malay political dominance and the special position provided for them in the constitution.

He dismissed the Bangsa Malaysia notion as fostering a rojak of races in the country, though we Malaysians know that rojak tastes a whole lot better than each of its constituent components. But obviously Abdul Ghani in his preference for racial purity had thought differently.

He warned ominously that the Bangsa Malaysia concept, if subjected to abuse, could threaten national stability, but he failed to define what he meant by 'abuse'.

Abdul Ghani would only grudgingly allow use of the Bangsa Malaysia term provided it was only applied with the Malays as the pivotal race of the peoples of Malaysia - essentially upholding the non-negotiability of Ketuanan Melayu and its Aryan-like concept of Malay supremacy. Thus to him, there could be a Bangsa Malaysia and a bangsa malaysia, with the former capitalised to indicate his pivotal race while the latter in lower case would be the 'nons'.

Separated and stratified

We may thus take it that he wanted and we may assume, still wants the races in Malaysia to continue to be separated and economically and politically stratified.

As if that was not bad enough, Abdul Ghani then followed that up by insulting the hallowed memory of the most esteemed late Onn Jaafar when he launched the five-day Datuk Onn (Johor's most illustrious son) National Conference at Persada Johor.

He said that if people understood why a Bangsa Malaya was rejected during Umno founder Onn Jaafar's leadership they should also realise why any concept akin to it could not be accepted.

That was sheer nonsense because the late Onn didn't propose that.

Here was how this man twisted the events of history, by extrapolating a pre-independence Umno in the 1950s not wanting to open its doors to all ethnic groups as proof that 21st Century Malaysians also did not want to merge into a united nationality.

Then he said pointedly: "It is about everything being equal and this does not capture the hearts of Malaysians."

Well, what can one say? According to Abdul Ghani Othman, Malaysians (rather than Umno members) do not want 'equality'.

And then without batting an eyelid, he had the gall to aver: "We, as Malays, and even the non-Malays, should admit that Datuk Onn's idea of kenegaraan should be inherited and practised. This is the idea that has united the Malays, and also the same idea that has given privileges to other races to be citizens, live together and share power and prosperity. Datuk Onn has left a heritage which is priceless and should be used as a guide for all generations."

Abdul Ghani showed utterly no shame in twisting a good man's vision, and insulting his exemplary name, to support his bigoted concept of a pivotal race, and blasphemed the illustrious name of the late Onn Jaafar, a man who left Umno, a party he founded and headed until August 1951, because he was so disgusted with Umno's communalist policies in refusing to open its membership to all Malaysians and for Umno to be renamed as the United Malaysians National Organisation.

That was one occasion when I wanted Hishammuddin Hussein to draw his keris to defend his grandfather's honour and true policies!

Now, which Chinese had said Abdul Ghani Othman is seen by many Chinese Johoreans as a moderate Umno leader?

Could it be Liew Kin See, the property developer who claimed Chinese have fared well under pro-bumiputera policies such as the New Economic Policy (NEP). Mind, I personally don't recall benefiting from a seven percent discount when I bought my first house. I dare say I would have ended up, together with many other non-Malays, subsidising instead the seven percent enjoyed by bumiputeras buying houses under the NEP.

Or could it be Vincent Tan, or Francis Yeoh or young Jho Low?

So when the voters of Gelang Patah go to the polls, just remember who the real Abdul Ghani Othman is, the man who doesn't believe Malaysians should be equal and that the Malays must remain the supreme pivotal race.