

Defenestration of the MCA

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COMMENT The final list is out. MCA will be contesting 37 parliamentary and 90 state seats. Its leader, Dr Chua Soi Lek, wanting to be of service to the party, will not be leading the charge.

Two of its vice-presidents including Ng Yen Yen and Gan Ping Sieu have been dropped. But most significantly, five-term Pandan MP and former MCA president Ong Tee Keat has also been left out.

Ever since the 1957 general elections, the MCA has been losing its position of parity with Umno as the party was denied 'seats'. The decision to give rural voters an advantage over urban ones sealed its fate.

With the resignation of Dr Lim Chong Eu (left) as president in 1959, the MCA could no longer claim to be an equal partner with Umno. It must be remembered that Lim was forced out because he demanded a fairer share of seat distribution that would ensure the MCA developed into an equal party with Umno.

Without the seats to make a difference, the MCA was pitted against anti-government elements in urban areas to ruinous effect.

Since 1969, the MCA cannot even claim to represent Chinese Malaysians as it lost the Chinese-majority state of Penang to Gerakan. Since then, the party has been more reliant on mixed seats to win elections.

For an ethnic-based party, this is a major challenge that it has not been able to surmount. Even in 2004, with a great swing to the BN, the MCA was actually weakened as Umno claimed that it could literally go it alone. There was little need to even pretend to be 'equal'.

On the eve of the 13th general election, the defenestration of the MCA is finally completed. It is a party whose president is not capable and 'winnable' enough to be fielded. It has also had to give up seats to Umno despite its incumbents holding on to a substantial majority.

In Gelang Patah, for example, MCA's Tan Ah Eng won by 8,851 votes in 2008 and over 30,000 in 2004. Yes, the DAP's Lim Kit Siang is formidable but I would have thought the MCA president could have taken him on and won.

The BN strategy is to field some 40 percent new faces at the parliamentary level and some 50 percent at the state legislative level. In the case of MCA giving up its seats, this is based upon good working partnership.

But the reality is that this exchange of seats is based upon the racial politics that underlie the BN formula. It exposes how the BN operates, preying on racial feelings and hoping to divide the Chinese votes to the advantage of Umno.

The MCA is simply not able to claw back any sense of respectability on the eve of a "make or break" election. Ng, the party's highest-profile minister, said that being dropped was "what I wanted". But she is also the most senior Chinese woman holding high office.

Chua's big risk

Leaving the stage shows how weak MCA has become and by clearing the decks of its high-profile members, Chua is taking a big risk. If big names are not 'winnable', the MCA has decided to go into the GE13 relying on its name. Unfortunately, it is not a very trustworthy brand.

Ever since the last general election, the MCA has had three changes of presidents. Ong Ka Ting resigned taking the blame for the party's poor performance in GE12. Tee Keat, who opened the Pandora's Box called PKFZ, was quickly removed in an EGM. His successor Chua continues to be plagued by a sex video. He and PKFZ are continually reference points for all that is wrong with the MCA.

Now, the MCA has been edged out at the finishing line. How can it possibly be effective within the BN formula ever again? The scales have fallen from the eyes of most Malaysians as several back-door ministers from MCA have performed rather horrendously.

Caretaker Health Minister Liow Tiong Lai, for example, was a disaster during the Bersih rally insisting that the Tung Shin Hospital was not tear-gassed! He is also unable to rise to the occasion during the tussle for influence in the party.

Tee Keat has warned the MCA that it will be judged by the people in GE13. It has put out a very weak list of candidates. The old faces are tired and uninspiring whilst the new ones are at best unknown quantities. None have the vision and charisma to represent the aspirations of the new Malaysia.

There is little doubt that the MCA may very well face its Waterloo on May 5. It must

learn from the experiences of Gerakan and the BN in Penang: the community it purports to represent has outgrown the worn-out creed of the MCA. It no longer wants to be represented by a party that has little gumption to champion issues that will benefit Malaysia.

Sadly, it is not even the party of the 'towkay' any more. It will be a miracle for the MCA to perform just as well as it did in 2008. The more likely scenario is that this ethnic Chinese political party will be totally dependent upon non-Chinese Malaysians to survive.

It is really not a question of giving people free dinners, conducting lucky draws and providing mindless entertainment. It is about the ability to represent all Malaysians effectively. It is about demonstrating leadership and ushering in a new political ideology for Malaysia.

The MCA used to mean something even if that something was bad. It is now just a sad party with a long history. At the grassroots level, the party seems to be imploding as MCA is forced to yield its constituencies to other parties especially Umno.

It is cocooned in a political coalition whose patron is the national advisor of Perkasa. It is a party that is so weak, its leader has to sit out the war entirely. It is highly unlikely that Malaysians will reward the MCA with their votes.

It is broken even before entering the race.

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