

**MCA leadership rooted in crisis**  
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As the Chinese saying goes, "xin xin zhi huo, zu yi liao yuan" (it just takes a few sparks to inflame a vast land). MCPX

This begs the question from public onlookers asking whether the recent MCA party's disastrous electoral performance is the only catalyst that has sparked off an open challenge against president Ong Ka Ting.

ong ka tingWhat makes it more significant about this active campaign calling for Ka Ting to graciously step down from the party stems from the fact that many of these active supporters were his former staunch supporters in "Team A".

Detractors to the president believed that Ka Ting is making a desperate attempt to diffuse calls for his resignation which is reaching a crescendo of attacks against his poor leadership quality. They were also responding to Ka Ting's tactical announcement that he had rejected a cabinet post or any government post.

Many have questioned the validity of Ka Ting's claim on the rejection since the appointment of government posts is the prerogative of the prime minister.

### **Less Cabinet reps**

Numerous voices including former national party leaders, state chiefs and active grassroots leaders across the country have echoed their demand in rejecting Ka Ting's offer to revamp the party and making it more relevant to the community.

"Ka Ting's rejection of government posting is irrelevant and invalid. Appointment of government posts is the prerogative of the prime minister," a former MCA party secretary-general Dr Ting Chew Peh said.

It widely speculated under the new government line-up, the MCA's share of ministerial posts in cabinet will be reduced from five to possibly three and the number of deputy ministers be cut back from 9 to 5.

mca press conference 151105 ong ka chuanIt is also speculated that Ka Ting has recommended his brother, Ong Ka Chuan to be appointed as the new Housing and Local Government Minister.

However, circulating rumours speculated that there are objections from certain influential quarters. So it remains to be seen whether this recommendation will be accepted.

Meanwhile, the stream of criticism had surfaced publicly from within the MCA circle, seriously casting doubts on Ka Ting's leadership quality. An outspoken former MCA minister indirectly criticising the president, said, "A poor quality leader is a person who claims credit for himself but when achievements by the party is not met, he claims collective responsibility.

"If the president cares for the party, he should graciously step down, as the party cannot afford another election battle that will bring more low morale and bad publicity for MCA."

It is learnt that Ka Ting will be calling a central committee meeting this weekend presumably to resolve the dissension and particularly on calls for his stepping down.

### **Wrong advisers around Ong**

Responding to the party president's latest move to call a central committee meeting, a party insider who once was aligned to Team A faction, said, "This is another old manipulative trick which were once used by a former party president during the Ling-Lim factional crisis period."

"I was in Team A before, so I know what I'm talking about. Some 80 percent of the central committee members have been defeated in the recent polls comprising new faces. Some have personal agendas to support the party president. But the most important argument I stress here is that the central committee under such circumstances cannot be seen to be reflective of the views of the party members."

An irate party state leader from Johor quipped, "The problem of the party president is that he is surrounded by wrong advisers and among the few is a national-level leader (he declined to name the leader) who has benefited the most from the party headquarters. This person is well known for grabbing the most tenders on projects."

Ironically, Ka Ting was also believed to be a key advisor to Dr Ling Liong Sik before he prematurely stepped down as party president in 2003.

mca agm 190807 abdullah badawi proudLatest reported in the mainstream dailies that detractors calling for the resignation of Ka Ting are considering holding a referendum to decide whether the party president should step down.

In fact, the history of MCA is characterised by serious internal strife and crises confronting changes in leadership transitions.

Many older generations among the Chinese community can still recall the controversial factional infighting from the leadership era of Lee San Choon to that of the Ling (Liong Sik)-Lim (Ah Lek) crisis in the recent past.

Following the 1969 general election, when the party lost control of the Penang state government and was decimated in Perak and elsewhere, MCA was out of the Malaysian cabinet. The party also effectively lost control of the key ministries including the finance portfolio.

Further undermined by the party's declining influence over the Chinese community, in 1971, a reform movement was launched by young turks from within by leaders like Alex Lee, Dr Lim Keng Yaik, Paul Leong and several others.

### **Unhealthy political culture**

A party crisis erupted and many in the movement were expelled from the party in 1973 resulting in many joining Gerakan. When Lee San Choon took over the leadership baton

from Tan Siew Sin in 1974, both the older and younger generation of reformers were no longer in the party.

Lee San Choon faced his first challenge in 1977 in a later leadership crisis when he tried to retire Lee Siok Yew as deputy president, showing preference to Chong Hon Ngan as a replacement. But the surprising outcome saw Michael Chen emerged as the deputy president. The episode of the party crisis deeply divided the party. It was with this scenario that the MCA entered the 1978 general election.

In recent times, the Ling (Liong Sik)-Lim (Ah Lek) crisis of MCA ended when former premier Dr Mahathir initiated a peace plan in 2002. Both Ka Ting and Kong Choy were appointed president and deputy president on May 23, 2003 when the predecessors Liong Sik and Ah Lek stepped down as a formula to end the protracted crisis within the party.

chua jui meng interview 040805 talkingIn May 2003, the MCA central committee elected both Ka Ting and Kong Choy as president and deputy respectively. At the party elections held on August 2005, both were elected by central delegates to their respective posts after warding off challenges from former vice-president Chua Jui Meng (Team B) and secretary-general Dr Ting Chew Peh.

It was after the election results that the president openly announced that MCA had no more factions.

But the current leadership challenge against Ka Ting is happening now, barely less than three years since the last party elections in 2005. What went wrong?

Is it due to the unhealthy political culture of the party system in not instituting a more democratic practice in top leadership transition and the replacement of stewardship at the higher rung? Was Ling Liong Sik wrongly advised by anointing a successor disregarding participatory democratic principles of a party election process in resolving the internal power struggle during his time?

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