

Political climb of the 'Ong' brothers
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"Noise proves nothing - often a hen merely laid an egg crackles as if she has laid an asteroid," said famous American novelist Mark Twain. MCPX

So when party president Ong Ka Ting introduced the imposition of term limits on office holders, capping the tenure of ministers and state executive councillors including his own presidency post to a maximum of nine years under constitutional amendments passed in 2003, his reform agenda was hailed as a refreshing change to the country's political landscape.

ong ka chuan and mcaKa Ting won praises for his many reforms since he took over in 2003. It included overhauling the membership registration system making it easier for recruitment of new members, limiting the number of delegates to the general assembly, setting new rules and regulations for electioneering campaign like stamping out money politics and discouraging practices in the distribution of election menu during party elections.

Also put in-charge was his brother, Ong Ka Chuan, of the responsibility to set up a political training school offering three areas of study, namely politics, professionalism and humanities. It was an ambitious plan to groom political leaders for the party.

Undisputed leader

In short, Ong Ka Ting's image was projected publicly as the "kampong boy" (with added emphasis on riding a bicycle) who grew up to become the president of Malaysia's second largest political party.

mca bring forward party polls 150308 ong ka tingIt was in 2005 that Ka Ting was reportedly perceived as the undisputed leader of MCA. Elected as president by the central committee under Articles 40 and 43 of the party's constitution in May 2003 following a protracted crisis between Dr Ling Liong Sik and Lim Ah Lek. "Many of his detractors were quick to cast doubts about his leadership capability and political staying power," wrote the Sun in an interview with Ka Ting.

Ka Ting's famous repetitive advice to his party subordinates patterned along the Chinese saying, "tang tang zheng zheng zuo ren, qing qing bai bai zuo guan, ta ta shi shi zuo shi."

It means that political leaders in MCA must aspire to be principled and of upright attitude; an official in the party and in government must be virtuous, endowed with integrity, responsible, diligent and conscientious in discharging official duties.

In 2005, Ka Ting appointed his brother Ka Chuan as secretary- general to keep him "politically afloat" following his electoral defeat in 2004 having lost the Batu Gajah seat in Perak.

The appointment raised some eyebrows but it was a well thought publicity tact that Ka Ting pulled through the endorsement by the central committee.

29 years to reach the top

chua jui meng and ong ka ting Nobody is exactly sure when and how everything started to go sour in the party. But one thing was certain, the party began to see the crack soon after the party elections of 2005 when Ka Ting emerged the victor with "less than two-third" of votes polled (1,515) while his challenger, former minister Chua Jui Meng obtained 819 votes.

Even for the hyperactive president, time was running out. In 2006, on the fourth day of the lunar Chinese New Year, a small group of MCA headquarters staff gathered at the main entrance of Wisma MCA. The drumming and prancing of four lion dance troupes sought a good symbolic omen for the Ong leadership as two brothers formally stood gallantly to receive the blessings for that year.

The event was both jolting and memorable.

It had taken the two 'Ong' brothers almost 29 years in their political climb to the pinnacle of power in the party. It was a symbolic achievement since their first humble beginning as political voluntary activists, joining the MCA Federal Territory under the leadership of Tan Koon Swan (who was MCA vice-president and member of Parliament for Damansara constituency in 1984).

Between 1979 and 1982, Ka Ting played his activist role under the mentorship of Tan Koon Swan (who later became the party president in 1985) while Ka Chuan served actively under Wang Choon Wing (former MCA national organising secretary) in the Federal territory constituencies of Damansara and Setapak respectively.

When the party leadership tussle between Dr Neo Yee Pan and Tan Koon Swan reached its height following the expulsion of 14 MCA leaders on 19 March 1984, the Ong brothers were actively travelling across the country within 24 hours obtaining signatures from more than two-third of party delegates calling an EGM to resolve the phantom members issue.

The rest is history.

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