

MCA: Big guns draw up battle lines
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"This year's divisional nominations are unlike those that took place previously," observed a party veteran from Wilayah Kuala Lumpur MCA on the significance of the MCA election which look set to become an epic battle on October 18.
MCPX

"It is different this year. The indication by incumbent president Ong Ka Ting that he is not re-contesting has freed "bottom-up support" at the branch elections and given a different character to the nominations and elections at the division level," he added.

ong ka ting interview 140408 06An official said out of 191 divisions, the nomination exercise completed on Tuesday, indicated that only 75 divisions would be facing contests.

It is, however, not known how many complaints were lodged at the MCA headquarters during nominations at the divisional level.

The party veteran has some valid observations on recent indications. If the American cliché that "all politics is local" is true, the results of the nominations indicate that it is all about hopefuls, political come-backs, new enthusiasts, opportunists and even a "ghostly re-visit" of the factional Team A and B.

Ka Ting's decision not to defend his presidency has become a major contributory factor to the difference between the coming divisional elections on July 27 and those that took place in 2005.

Personality conflicts at the local level, loyalty and political re-alignment become interesting and features that will dominate the elections. This year, divisional elections also lack control by the leadership in view of Ka Ting's impending departure.

Rather, the theme for the party is a new direction, reform and renewal with the changing of the top leadership line-up this coming October.

The list of posts up for grabs at the national level in the coming party elections are motivating many incumbents to contest for higher posts, particularly from the youth wing to the divisional level. Criss-crossing and horizontal movements have also characterised the divisional nominations, an indication that candidates are preparing for promotions or political come-backs.

mca leaders and barisan national 031104Comparing the divisional elections to a semi-final of a soccer tournament, many principal players are starting to warm up for the 'finals'.

In reality, contesting a post in the divisional election is a gate-way for a bigger opportunity or promotion at the national level.

Not surprisingly, the 'hot' seats up for divisional contests in Selangor, Perak, Penang, Johor and Malacca will involve top party personalities.

The demarcation of the Team A and B factionalism which existed during the Ling Liong Sik

leadership era has blurred, with new political alignments taking shape in tandem with new leadership changes.

Aspiring candidates aplenty

In short, the divisional battle-lines have been drawn and are important goals for any aspiring candidate at the national level.

Former human resources minister and vice-president Dr Fong Chan Onn, speculated as a possible candidate for the presidency is facing competition from Ngow Duo Soon for the Alor Gajah (Malacca) divisional chairperson's post. If he clears the hurdle, it will pave the way for him to contest for the president's post.

It is widely believed that Fong's move is being supported by Liong Sik.

Another presidential candidate, Chua Jui Meng from Johor, is also vying for the Bakri division chairperson's post, forcing a three- cornered fight with Tay Khim Seng (divisional treasurer) and William Tan Geok Chan (branch deputy chair).

Another candidate from Johor, Dr Chua Soi Lek has been returned unopposed as chairperson of his Batu Pahat division. Chua, who resigned from the post after a sex video controversy, is speculated as a contender for the deputy president's post, retracting from his earlier decision to contest against Ka Ting.

In Selangor, more than half of the total 22 divisions will be facing a contest for the top post, with only three divisional chairpersons elected unopposed. They are Donald Lim Siang Chai (PJ Selatan), Low Kim Mang (Ampang) and Lee Wei Kiat (Subang).

Out of the three, Donald is speculated to contest a higher post at the national level. As expected, two other former top leaders, namely Ting Chew Peh and Yap Pian Hon, are nominating themselves as central delegates for the Kapar and Puchong divisions respectively.

Both are believed to be positioning themselves for a contest at the top level. It is believed that Yap might be contesting a vice-president's post .

In Perak, the party's secretary general Ong Ka Chuan has been returned unopposed as the Tapah division chairperson. He has not indicated what post he will be contesting at the top level, though some quarters believe he would be contesting the vice-president's post.

Charting a new course

Ka Chuan's rival faction is also making much headway in the divisional fight in Perak. His detractors believe that Ka Chuan has influence in half of the 24 divisions in Perak. Six divisions are facing "one-to-one" straight fights, namely Ipoh Timur, Kampar, Ipoh Barat, Gopeng and Batu Gajah.

Liong Sik's son, Hee Leong was returned unopposed as Kuala Kangsar youth divisional leader at the nomination on July 21, paving way for his bid for the national youth chief's post.

Vying for a vice presidency post, Wee Ka Siong who is also currently the youth secretary-general, was returned unopposed as the divisional chairperson of Johor Baru following incumbent Freddie Long's decision to step down. Wee is believed to be not keen to vie for the national youth chairmanship.

In Penang, the factional challenges between former state chairperson Wong Kam Hoong and Ooi Siew Kim are prevailing in the divisional contests, with straight one-to-one battles in the divisions of Tanjong, Jelutong, Bukit Bendera, Tasek Gelugor and Nibong Tebal. Lawyer Ooi is expected to bid for a top Wanita post at the national level.

MCA watchers said the main agenda at the divisional elections is the changing of the guards and the end of the Ong dynasty. The imminent departure of Ka Ting at the national scene which will result in a new elected successor is the main cause that has prompted a scrambling of old and new candidates to contest for new posts at the divisional level.

Most party veterans view the number of candidates at divisions facing contests or remaining unopposed as insignificant. Rather, their attention is on the "who's who" making their bids at the national level.

The new national line-up in October will truly determine the destiny of MCA.

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