

MCA the voice of the Chinese

Ong: We believe in tackling problems head-on and resolving them

The Star - 2/11/2007

By NG SI HOOI
sihooi@thestar.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: The MCA has, without fail, voiced the feelings of the Chinese community at all internal meetings in the Government and Barisan Nasional, said MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting.

"We do not run away from or avoid any issues. We believe in results and actual consequences rather than in making superficial statements and leaving problems unresolved," he said in an interview with *The Star* yesterday.

Ong, who is Housing and Local Government Minister, also expressed his disappointment over some political remarks that had hurt the feelings of the Chinese community.

Apart from that, he touched on various issues including his continuing efforts to look into problems affecting Chinese primary schools, the 50th Merdeka celebrations as well as his achievements and plans for the MCA.

Below is the interview with Ong:

Q: What is your biggest achievement since you became party president?

A: We managed to strengthen our unity and stayed closer together since we took over the party leadership. All our differences are a thing of the past. Although there is no perfect situation in any political party at any time, the MCA today is stable, harmonious and united.

The central committee (CC) has laid out future directions and plans – the MCA 9-Point Party Platform (9PPP) – that covers wide-ranging issues from revitalising education to the lifelong learning campaign and to cultivating a just and caring society.

We have also introduced a new and healthier political culture including limiting the party president's tenure and those of its serving MPs, ministers, state executive councillors, and municipal and city councillors.

The MCA holds regular dialogues and meetings with the Malaysian Chinese Economic Consultative Council, which was jointly formed by the party and Chinese guilds and associations, to discuss ways to improve the nation's competitiveness level, to play a positive role in the nation's economy so that the Chinese community will continue to stay in the mainstream of national economic development and not be marginalised.

Q: What are the biggest disappointments in 2006? Why?

A: A number of issues had bothered the Chinese community. Some political remarks that had hurt the feelings of the community and led to uneasiness, even creating uncertainty, should not have happened. The statements based on "zero-sum game" in which one race enjoys prosperity that will lead to another race losing out have also bothered the community.

Without fail, the MCA has voiced the feelings and uneasiness of the

Chinese community at all internal meetings in the Government as well as the Barisan Nasional. The MCA has been misunderstood by those who do not have the opportunity to attend our internal briefings.

I must stress that all the issues concerning the Chinese community last year were addressed firmly by the MCA. We do not run away from or avoid any issues. We believe in results and actual consequences rather than in making superficial statements and leaving problems unresolved.

However, we also take note of the fact that in politics, we have to speak up from time to time to create an impact in public perception.

In Malaysia, we have a constraint because we are a multiracial society. Without racial harmony and political stability, the country's development cannot be achieved.

The MCA has its constraints because, on the one hand, we have to safeguard the interests of the community, and on the other, we have to maintain racial harmony and national unity.

Q: What are your plans for the party in 2007?

A: We will intensify the implementation of the 9PPP. We will also contin-

»In politics, we have to speak up from time to time to create an impact in public perception«

DATUK SERI ONG KA TING

ue to resolve the issues affecting the Chinese community. We need to have more forums and seminars to pave the way for discussions so that the correct messages could be disseminated effectively and accurately.

Q: What are your views on the involvement of non-Malays in GLCs?

A: The MCA thinks that as the GLCs belong to the Government, they should be open to all Malaysians. MCA has proposed several times to the Cabinet to recruit more non-Malays for the GLCs. This is to ensure that they will have an opportunity to

contribute to the country.

The Cabinet has agreed in principle that the GLCs should recruit more talented people to manage the companies regardless of race.

Q: What are your plans to attract young Malaysians to join the MCA?

A: Since last year, we have been getting more young people to join the MCA. This is just the beginning of the young membership recruitment drive.

We have been holding dialogues and forums to explain to the youths the importance of politics, especially in participating in mainstream politics in a multiracial society.

Q: There is speculation that the general election will be held soon – this year or 2008. What are the preparations being undertaken by the MCA?

A: Personally, I feel that there is no hurry to call for a general election. In 2007, we should focus on economic development besides increasing the country's competitiveness and improving the overall situation – social and education. We should not carry out our tasks just based on the general election's needs.

Whether the MCA is prepared for

the election or not is not the main concern, it should be whether the MCA is at all times relevant, effective and trustworthy in the eyes of the general public and the community.

Q: Education is one main area of focus of the MCA. What are the party's plans for Chinese primary schools?

A: Through the MCA's efforts in the past six years, a number of Chinese primary schools were approved to be built or relocated to new areas especially in new townships with high Chinese density. This has eased problems of the lack of Chinese schools in certain areas.

I have personally talked to Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein on this issue over the past two years. I told him of the passion of the Chinese community towards these Chinese schools. We will continue to work hard for this.

»The country belongs to all races. The Chinese community has contributed to nation-building«

DATUK SERI ONG KA TING

Q: Each year after the public examinations, the issue of the lack of scholarships pops up. What can the MCA do?

A: I have brought up the issue relating to the awarding of JPA scholarships to Malaysians who scored 10A1 and above irrespective of race as they are future leaders and contributors. The numbers of top scorers have increased, so of late, the Government has to take into consideration 'household income' as an additional factor besides excellent results. This had resulted in the wrong public perception – on why some applicants were rejected.

However, I must say that through the MCA's efforts in the last six years alone, the JPA has offered more than 1,500 scholarships to deserving Chinese students.

Q: The country will be celebrating its 50th Merdeka Day. What do you hope to see in the coming months so that the celebrations will be more meaningful?

A: The party will organise a series of activities to celebrate and commemorate our nation's 50th birthday. We have already started this series of activities by commemorating the MCA founder and one of Malaya's forefathers, Tun Tan Cheng Lock, on Dec 15.

The country belongs to all races. The Chinese community has contributed to nation-building and we will continue to enjoy our rights. We must always be positive about our role and position in this country.