

MCA heading for irrelevance, says Tee Keat
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 1 — The MCA is on the path to irrelevance, its former president Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat said this week ahead of the party's annual gathering this weekend.

He told The Malaysian Insider in an interview that the Barisan Nasional (BN) component has not heeded the push for reform that saw the party lose 25 of the 40 federal and 59 of the 90 state seats it contested in Election 2008.

Ong said the reforms he tried to implement in the MCA 'all went down the drain' after he was ousted. — File pic

"MCA is still stuck in the mindset of being gung-ho with statements instead of delivering good governance. It is parroting old polemic rather than delivering reforms asked for by voters.

"If MCA continues on this same old path and psyche, then it is certainly headed for irrelevance. Some have bluntly said we are already irrelevant," said Ong, who was deposed as MCA boss by Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek in a fractious power struggle 18 months ago.

The Pandan MP cited, as examples of "empty platitudes," his successor's threats to quit BN if Umno implemented hudud and to resign from the Cabinet and other government posts if the party does not improve in a general election expected soon.

"I don't see how his threats can lift the party from its doldrums," he said.

The party holds what is likely to be its final general assembly this weekend before federal polls are called.

But despite having three presidents in as many years, the MCA has seen Chinese support continue to shrink in by-elections.

Some analyses state that the Tenang polls held earlier this year saw just 18 per cent of Chinese voting for BN.

Datuk Seri Najib Razak has begun taking over the charge for Chinese votes, spending last weekend dishing out RM15 million to Chinese schools and exempting a Community Chest project headed by Chinese tycoons from tax to help it channel RM100 million a year into vernacular education.

"Najib as BN chief is spearheading initiatives to win Chinese votes, triggering the question of 'where is MCA?' from the public," Ong said.

He said the MCA could not shirk its responsibility as part of government despite Umno's seniority in the ruling coalition.

"How are they justifying their position as minister? Chinese want a level playing field. Ministers must get rid of cronies and monopolies," he said.

Ong cited his 26-month tenure as transport minister where he opened the probe on the RM12.5 billion Port Klang Free Zone scandal even though senior officers told him it was a closed case.

"I put aside considerations of whether or not it would implicate Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik or Tan Sri Chan Kong Choy," he said of the former MCA president and deputy who were Ong's predecessors as transport minister.

"I was more concerned about how the party had been linked to that debacle which was a key factor in the March 2008 tsunami," he added, referring to the BN's landmark loss of its customary two-thirds majority in Parliament and five state governments.

But, he said, the reforms he tried to implement in the party and in the Transport Ministry, now headed by MCA secretary-general Datuk Seri Kong Cho Ha, "all went down the drain" after he was ousted.

He also said he tried to caution Datuk Seri Ng Yen Yen whose tourism projects such as the RM1.8 million spent on developing six Facebook tourism campaigns have been repeatedly questioned.

"Taxpayers have every reason to ask, how can you justify your presence in that portfolio?" he said of the tourism minister, who was also criticised last year when Parliament revealed that she slashed her tourism promotional budget but increased spending on her official trips abroad.

Ng also came under fire after Tourism Malaysia's former advertising agency alleged that the ministry had asked for bribes in exchange for a promotion contract.

"I admit that I failed to convince the party to change its mindset," he said of his 18 months in charge of the MCA.

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