

Review of racial ties

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — The Barisan Nasional will consider the MCA's suggestion to set up a special panel to re-examine race relations in the country, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan Nasional chairman, added that the suggestion was good but the terms of reference of the panel needed to be worked out.

He was speaking to reporters after opening the MCA's 33rd general assembly here.

MCA president Datuk Dr Ling Liong Sik made the suggestion in his presidential address at the one-day assembly.

Other BN component party leaders welcomed the MCA proposal (*see report on Page 3*).

In making the proposal, Datuk Dr Ling said it was aimed at combating racial polarisation and enhancing national unity.

"This high-level panel should evolve strategies on how to ensure that sensitive issues

which might divide and polarise the various communities are not exploited by unscrupulous politicians."

He added that the panel, as well as the Barisan Nasional and the nation, should reaffirm the principles of the Rukunegara as its starting point.

This would help build a progressive and stable Malaysian society based on equality, jus-

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tice, mutual respect and tolerance in all aspects of life.

While reiterating the MCA's support for the BN system, Datuk Dr Ling said there should also be bold and innovative policy adjustments to squarely face the problem of racial polarisation.

"The Barisan system is one system to achieve national unity.

"However, it is apparent that whatever dialogue there has been in the Barisan Nasional system

has not been enough to stamp out the curse of racial polarisation which is on the increase."

He said this polarisation was due largely to deliberate attempts by various extremist groups and individuals competing for political power and wanting to be portrayed as champions of their communities.

Stressing that no one community could survive on its own in the country, he said that if communities were at loggerheads, as had happened in other countries, only political and economic chaos would result.

"We need an ethic of tolerance and moderation. No other ethic will work."

Datuk Dr Ling, who became party president on Sept 3 following the resignation of Mr Tan Koon Swan, said the MCA leadership would not only exercise restraint in the face of provocation from "ultras" but would also try to persuade "these misguided deviants" of the folly of their opportunism in playing with racial fire.

The MCA would continue to approach problems and issues in the BN spirit of goodwill and cooperation.

"It was this spirit that enabled us to arrive at the consensus of the Merdeka period, a consensus that we stand by unwaveringly, and reaffirm our support for, during this period of uncertainty and stress."