

BN LEADERS 'AYE' TO RACE RELATIONS PANEL

STAR 17 NOV 1986

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Prime Minister and Barisan Nasional chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his colleagues in the ruling coalition welcomed a MCA suggestion that the Barisan supreme council set up a special panel to re-examine race relations in the country.

They agreed with MCA president Datuk Dr Ling Liong Sik that such a high-level panel could find ways to ensure that sensitive and racial issues were not exploited by unscrupulous politicians.

Dr Ling had made the suggestion in his presidential address at the MCA general assembly, opened by Dr Mahathir, in Wisma MCA this morning.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, told reporters later: "I am quite sure we can consider it (the suggestion) in the Barisan. We'll have to work out the terms of reference first but in principle, I would agree that it is a very good suggestion."

MIC deputy president Datuk S. Subramaniam, in welcoming the suggestion, said that the Barisan was formed not just to win elections.

"It was formed to promote goodwill and understanding among the people of all races," he said.

He added that more specific attention must be given to race-relation to ensure that controversial is-

sues did not arise in public.

"We prefer that leaders discuss such issues in private to bring about amicable solutions," he said.

Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) president Datuk Amar Stephen Yong described Dr Ling's proposal as a "good idea" and said: "We should explore it further to see how we can do it."

He said that most of the Barisan component party leaders were in the Cabinet which meant that they had to spend more time on affairs of State, especially on matters relating to their respective Ministries.

"If we have a Barisan panel, we can narrow down the discussion to the relationship between component parties and find ways to improve it further and work closer together."

"Sensitive and racial problems can also be discussed by the panel to see how they can be solved," said Datuk Amar Yong.

Gerakan president Datuk Dr Lim Keng Yaik said the special panel should be an independent body and should comprise community leaders and public interest groups.

"The more people there are to discuss and understand the problems, the less chances there will be for extremists to capitalise on the problems," he said and added that the Gerakan "generally welcomes" Dr Ling's suggestion.