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Delegates united in support of MCA leadership, focused on economy

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WITH no contentious issues to distract them, the national delegates to the one-day MCA 45th annual general assembly on Saturday kept their focus on the party's direction in helping the country tackle its economic problems.

Is this the lull before the storm in view of the party elections next year?

Judging from the proceedings, the delegates seemed to be sending a strong signal of their endorsement to party leaders for adopting several measures and commitment to maintain a strong, stable and united MCA.

Political observers believe that under the leadership of Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and his team, the party is united and will be able to weather and stave off a serious challenge from the Opposition in the next general elections.

Having achieved its best electoral results in 1995, when the party won 31 parliamentary and 73 State seats (including one in Sabah), Dr Ling is expected to retain the team, or at the most opt for only minor changes.

He said in an interview that the mandate given by the people to MCA candidates in the last general election had been proven correct.

"Look at our elected representatives, they are working full time to handle varied problems faced by the people and even bring them up in parliament and State assemblies," Dr Ling said.

He took a dig at the DAP as a party which "is consistently critical, negative and destructive (CCND) and no action, talk only (Nato)".

He said the DAP thrived on issues associated with the present economic downturn to survive.

Dr Ling also has a simple message to the party's elected representatives: "Work hard and even harder for the people who have given you their support."

As for the party elections, MCA deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek had said at the MCA Youth assembly, held a day earlier, that there should be minimal contests next year.

However, this did not mean that there should be no contest, he said.

His message to the party members is to retain elected leaders who have worked hard and to weed out those non-performing leaders through the democratic process.

At the party's assembly, what was even more conspicuous this time, were the unity and the attendance of political friends and foes of yesteryears.

Such acts of conciliation and letting bygones be bygones were obvious with the presence of past party leaders, who were engaged in the infamous party crisis of the early 80s.

Among those who came were party life president Tan Sri Lee San Choon, Tan Koon Swan, Datuk Dr Neo Yee Pan, Datuk Lee Kim Sai, Datuk Kee Yong Wee, Tan Sri Chong Hon Nyan, Datuk Wong Seng Chow, Tun Omar Yoke Lin Ong, Tan Sri Lee Siok Yew, Datuk Tan Cheng Swee, Datuk Lew Sip Hon, Datuk Chan Kit Chee, Datuk Dr Tan Tiong Hong, Datuk Kam Woon Wah and Datuk Yeoh Kian Teik, a former Perak Youth chief and father of James Bond girl, Michelle Yeoh.

Their presence even prompted the guest-of-honour Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also the Barisan Nasional chairman, to make some comments before he delivered his speech.

His remark that most politicians faded away when they no longer held party or government positions (Umno not excluded), has given much food for

thought.

Lest we forget, Dr Mahathir had on many occasions reminded such politicians that they were given the opportunity to continue playing their role in national development through political vehicles.

Besides this show of unity by the MCA, there also appeared to be a total absence of lobbying among the elected representatives in preparations for the party elections next year.

Issues related to the economic problems stole the limelight.

Even Dr Ling's presidential address was focused on the premise of the party's political agenda to help the country overcome the economic problems in the shortest possible time.

The MCA chief reiterated the party's commitment to continue the "Love Malaysia, Buy Local Products" campaign and the need to keep our ringgit from leaving the country with his repeated exhortations of study locally, save in local banks, visit local tourist destinations and buy local products.

The assembly also saw the smooth passage of four amendments to the party constitution which included the increase in the number of Wanita delegates to the general assembly, expand the central committee and endorsing a formula to keep the number of national delegates at a manageable number.

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