

15/06/1999

DPM: No tussle for Penang CM's post

Lee Keng Fatt; Marina Emmanuel

PENANG, Mon. - Speculation that the MCA is lobbying for extra state seats in Penang for the coming general election with the intention of taking over the Chief Ministership from the Gerakan was quashed today by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Dismissing a news report which quoted "high-level political sources", Abdullah said it could not have originated from a Barisan Nasional component party leader.

"I do not think any Barisan Nasional leader could have said that," he said, referring to the front-page report published by The Sun today.

He urged BN component parties not to focus on seat distribution. "My advice to all BN component parties is when the time comes to field your candidates, go ahead and do it. But for now, please concentrate on party tasks at hand."

Abdullah had earlier launched Universiti Sains Malaysia's 30th anniversary celebrations in Minden.

There was no immediate reaction from Penang Gerakan leaders. Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, the State BN chief and State Gerakan chairman who was also present at the function, left before reporters could get his reaction.

State MCA chairman Datuk Dr Sak Cheng Lum also appeared suprised by the report when asked by reporters earlier.

He said he was only aware of such talk after reading the report.

"I personally am not aware of such a move," he said at a Press conference this morning. "However, this sort of decision is normally made at top BN level."

The MCA contested and won all nine State seats in the 1995 general election but Gerakan won 10 seats although it contested in 11 constituencies.

Dr Sak said the party's objective was to regain all seats.

"It is with this objective that we made our State Assemblymen and MPs work very hard not only to deliver but work as a team."

In Kuala Lumpur, MCA secretary-general Datuk Ting Chew Peh said the party would leave it to the Barisan Nasional leadership to decide on the allocation of seats in Penang for the election.

He said only Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also BN chairman, could decide on the number of seats for each component party.

"We are eyeing every seat that has been contested by the MCA. But if a seat was previously contested by other BN component parties, then it would have to be discussed with the BN leadership."

"So far, there has not been any discussion held on this."

Describing the news report as "naughty", Ting said: "We have been very busy preparing for our national party election to be held on July 17 and for the coming general election."

He said with yesterday's conclusion of the party's State and Wanita elections, the MCA was now concentrating on its national elections.

A total of 2,300 delegates will decide on MCA's national leadership.

They will determine the president, deputy president, four vice-presidents and 25 central committee members. Nomination day is on July 12.

(END)