

15 DEC 1999

Koh-Post

MCA'S REQUEST FOR SECOND DEPUTY CM'S POST REJECTED

PULAU PINANG, Dec 15 (Bernama) -- The MCA's request for an additional deputy chief minister's post in Pulau Pinang has been rejected by the Barisan Nasional (BN) leadership, Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said today.

Dr Koh also said that Pulau Pinang MCA chairman Datuk Dr Sak Cheng Lum has not been re-appointed to the state executive council at his own request.

Teluk Bahang assemblyman Datuk Dr Hilmi Yahaya is the new deputy chief minister, replacing Datuk Mohamed Shariff Omar who has joined the federal administration as deputy agriculture minister.

Speaking at a press conference, Dr Koh said the decision to reject MCA's request was made following talks with Prime Minister and BN Chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The MCA forwarded its request to the BN leadership based on its success in winning all nine state seats it contested in the Nov 29 general election.

The MCA had also requested for an additional exco seat, but Dr Koh said today there is no change in the seat allocation among the four BN component parties in the exco.

The MCA will continue to have two exco members, Umno four, Gerakan four (including the chief minister) and the MIC one.

"All parties left it to the BN leadership to decide, and a decision has been made. There's no excuse for all sides not to accept the decision," said Dr Koh.

The chief minister said Dr Sak decided to stay out of the exco after talks with the MCA leadership.

Dr Koh, who is the state BN chairman, said he too had spoken with Dr Sak regarding the matter.

Asked if he views Dr Sak's decision as a sign of protest against the rejection of the MCA's request, Dr Koh said: "This we leave it to him if he wishes to reply on behalf of the MCA."

He said the MCA submitted to Dr Mahathir only the names of Datuk Koay Kar Huah and Dr Loh Hock Hun for exco posts.

Koay, who previously held the youth and sports portfolio, has now been put in charge of the Works, Public Amenities and Transport Committee, while Dr Loh replaces Dr Sak as chairman of the Trade, Business and Consumer Affairs Committee.

Pressed for the reason behind Dr Sak's decision to stay out, Dr Koh said: "I don't wish to comment. I feel I have already answered the question. However, my relationship with him at the personal level remains very good."

Dr Koh said it would take "some time" for ties between the MCA and Gerakan, which have become strained over the issue, to return to normal.

"I believe ties will become good again because both parties are matured and subscribe to the BN spirit. I view the current dispute as differences in opinion within the same family," he said.

Dr Koh said Gerakan-MCA ties had been good over the last nine years and there were no problems between the two parties.

-- BERNAMA

sa/ner sk

