

Good SUN 17 MAY 2001 move: MCA

Parties say it's timely for PM
to have Chinese special assistant

PETALING JAYA, Wed: The MCA today welcomed the move to appoint an apolitical Chinese special assistant to advise Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on matters concerning the community.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said: "I think it is a very good move."

"In the past, he (Mahathir) has had many press secretaries, but I think he would need some people who are well-versed in the Chinese language so that he can also monitor the media," he said in response to the impending appointments reported by *The Sun* today.

Besides the special assistant, Mahathir also plans to appoint the country's first Chinese press secretary to the prime minister. While the identity of the special assistant is not known, *Nanyang Siang Pau* deputy chief editor Cheng Kee Chien is believed to be Mahathir's choice for press secretary.

On the need for the appointments since MCA has been performing a similar task, Ling said: "Within cabinet, of course. We tell what are the feelings of the Chinese ... Gerakan, even (LDP president and Sabah Chief Minister Datuk) Chong Kah Kiat and (Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk) Law Hieng Ding from Sarawak."

"I think the prime minister cannot wait for such meetings (cabinet) once a week. He wants to be updated daily.

"This is because he meets the press every day, the press would ask him questions and he has to comment," said Ling.

MCA deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek said the appointment will benefit the government as it can get feedback and settle issues confronting the community.

"The prime minister has many advisers for various matters and thus, it is timely for him to appoint someone to advise him on Chinese issues," he said when asked to com-

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ment on the proposed appointments.

"It will be better to have a Chinese assistant as he will be in constant contact with the prime minister and will be able to reach him easily," he added.

Gerakan Youth chief Teng Chang Yeow said such an appointment is appropriate because an apolitical appointee can present another viewpoint. "Politicians sometimes tend to look at things too politically," he said in Penang.

MCA Youth chief Datuk Ong Tee Keat said such a positive move will help articulate the community's views and aspirations to the prime minister.

On whether the appointment will enable Mahathir to have closer ties with the community and help overcome certain issues affecting it, he said: "Whenever there is an issue, we are bound to face a wide spectrum of reactions and mixed responses. It will be beneficial for the prime minister to proactively address such negative issues swiftly."

DAP chairman Lim Kit Siang said the move shows the four MCA ministers have become "ineffective" in representing the community, especially when they claim to be the representatives of the Chinese.

He said they must bear full responsibility for the stand taken by Mahathir and BN over negative issues the community faces.