

# Chinese aides a boost for Barisan leadership

News analysis by  
**WONG CHUN WAI**

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THE decision by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to appoint two Chinese special aides is certainly a boost to the Barisan Nasional leadership.

The Prime Minister's decision to name a Chinese political secretary and a Chinese press secretary will enable him to have better insight into the sentiments of the community.

At present, Dr Mahathir has three political secretaries and a press secretary who, by tradition, are all Malays.

Currently, he also has a special officer who is a former *Bernama* economics editor.

His press secretary is another *Bernama* journalist while his assistant press secretary is from the *New Straits Times*, both on secondment.

A lawyer and *Nanyang Siang Pau* deputy chief editor Cheng Kee Chien have been

reportedly named as his newly appointed political secretary and press secretary respectively.

The new appointees will further enable the Government to convey its views to the Chinese community more effectively.

The appointments would allow Dr Mahathir to obtain quick translations of Chinese newspapers and as one report said "to be plugged into the Chinese media network."

So far, there has been no official announcement on the designations of the two appointees.

The foreign news agencies and an Internet news website, in their attempts to derile the MCA, have pointed out that the two new assistants do not belong to the party.

Except for Dr Mahathir's three political secretaries, who are all Umno members, the rest of his aides are either government servants or those on secondment from private companies.

Most of these aides are not Umno members. The appointment of the two Chinese aides, who are not MCA members, is thus not something unusual.

The insinuation that MCA has been snubbed by the leadership has no credence.

Dr Mahathir's move will certainly boost his standing among the Chinese community who are regarded as decisive voters in elections.

It is a demonstration of the leadership's commitment in wanting to tackle issues confronting the nation more effectively.

There have been controversies affecting the community including the failure of top SPM non-bumiputra students to secure the limited places in universities, the relocation of SRK (C) Damansara and the Vision Schools.

The MCA is already represented in the Cabinet together with other Chinese-based parties.

But the appointment of these two assistants will pro-

vide an independent view of issues affecting the community to the Prime Minister.

The task of monitoring issues highlighted by the Chinese newspapers is presently the task of the Home Ministry. MCA leaders also follow closely the views of these publications.

The Chinese newspapers have always adopted a more independent stand in their coverage of events.

The appointment of a Chinese press secretary will act as a link between these publications and the Government.

These newspapers, sometimes, are inward-looking and do not see the wider picture when a controversial issue crops up.

These special assistants, through constant contact with these newspapers, would lead to better interaction between both sides.

In the case of the political secretary, his role as an intermediary will provide the lead-

ership with more non-partisan views on issues, given the rivalry between Chinese-based component parties in the Barisan Nasional.

The Prime Minister has set a trend of appointing non-bumiputras as his special assistants. It should be emulated by key Cabinet ministers.

In Sabah, it has always been a practice for the chief ministers to appoint a few political secretaries from the main communities.

In Penang, former Chief Minister Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu had appointed a Malay as his press secretary.

Present Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon has continued the tradition.

The appointments are testimony to the leadership's effort to project a truly Malaysian Government represented by the multi-racial component parties in the Barisan.

It is also a continuation of Umno's track record in the politics of accommodation.