

PM: Chua was a stop-gap measure

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KUALA LUMPUR: MCA vice-president Datuk Chua Jui Meng was dropped as Kedah MCA chairman because the political situation in the state has improved and there is no more internal problems in the state MCA, Barisan Nasional chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"From what I was made to understand, he (Chua) was appointed as Kedah MCA liai-

son chairman (in 1993) because at that time Kedah MCA was facing some kind of internal crisis but now the problem has been resolved."

The Prime Minister said the appointment of Chua as state chief seven years ago was only a stop-gap measure to resolve the leadership crisis there.

"Now that there is no more problem in Kedah and the new leader chosen by the leadership is well accepted by the MCA members in the state,

the time has come for him (Chua) to step down as a stop-gap leader," he told reporters after opening the CEO Summit here yesterday.

Chua, who is the Health Minister and MP for Bakri in Johor, had led the Kedah MCA since 1993. On Tuesday, MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik replaced him with Kedah MCA secretary Datuk Beh Heng Seong, a state executive councillor.

Dr Mahathir said what MCA

had done in putting Chua as the Kedah MCA chief was similar to the practice in Umno, saying, "I was once the Kelantan Umno liaison chief but now that post had been taken over by someone else."

Chua had claimed that the decision made by Dr Ling to strip him of the post was due to his opposition to the party's purchase of Nanyang Press Holdings Bhd three months ago.

He also claimed that he was

a victim of a "witch hunt" by Dr Ling, but the Transport Minister refuted that claim and clarified that Chua's removal was a long-time request from Kedahans and had nothing to do with the party's decision to purchase the publisher of *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *China Press*.

Dr Ling had said that Kedah MCA members had always wanted a Kedahan to lead them.

On speculations of an immi-

nent Cabinet reshuffle, including dropping Chua as a minister, Dr Mahathir laughed and said: "You know, I don't like to reshuffle the Cabinet unless it's necessary."

Dr Mahathir stressed that just because a minister had lost a key party post did not mean that he would also be dropped from the Cabinet.

The two issues, he said, were not related at all because it was not like Chua had lost his elected post.