

22/06/2001

Don't drag PM into controversy, says MCA vice-president

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad should not be dragged into the controversy surrounding the Nanyang Press Holdings takeover by MCA.

MCA vice-president Datuk Chua Jui Meng said those concerned should not drop names just to garner support for their cause.

Chua, who is one of the eight senior MCA leaders who oppose the Nanyang deal, said the Prime Minister had made it clear that he never instructed anyone to buy the media group nor did he dictate on the quantum of equity ownership.

"Now you (the group) want to use the PM's name... I think it is wrong to use the PM's name (in the controversy)," Chua said after attending the 55th Umno General assembly opening this morning.

Chua, who is also the Health Minister, was asked to comment on news report in several leading Chinese dailies today that Dr Mahathir had requested the MCA to remain as a minority shareholder in the Nanyang Press Holdings.

Chua said certain quarters who were in favour of MCA holding on to its investment in Nanyang Press Holdings had embarked on a name-dropping strategy.

He added that the Chinese community would not be fooled by such tactics as they were aware of the way things were moving.

Asked about the probability of a no-confidence motion against party president Datuk Seri Ling Liong Sik being tabled during the MCA's extraordinary general meeting this Sunday, Chua said it was not necessarily so.

He said that the current controversy was not a personal battle but merely a move to ensure the continued survival of MCA as a party representing the Chinese community.

Justifying the community's worry over the monopoly of Chinese media in the country, Chua said even his views as vice-president of MCA were often curtailed from mainstream newspapers subservient to certain individuals in MCA.

He stressed that MCA must put its ears to the ground and not be unnecessarily defiant against the wishes of the Chinese community.

"We must open our eyes and accept the fact that thousands of community, business and clan-based Chinese organisations had openly objected to the takeover ... should we ignore them and lose their vital support?" Chua argued.

The Nanyang Press Holdings' 72.35 per cent share acquisition by MCA investment arm Huaren Management Sdn Bhd late last month sort of divided the party leadership into two factions.

The party president and several of his faithfuls supported the takeover of the media group which publishes the Nanyang Siang Pau and China Press dailies, while Deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek, vice-presidents Datuk Chua Jui Meng and Datuk Chan Kong Choy and Youth chief Datuk Ong Tee Keat were among a group of top party leaders who vigorously opposed the deal.

Prior to their open objection to the deal, scores of Chinese community, business and non-governmental organisations had expressed their fear and objected to the takeover.

(END)