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No room for fraction

THE brouhaha over the removal of vice-president Datuk Chua Jui Meng as the Kedah MCA chairman has left the public with the unfortunate perception that although MCA's outer shell of unity is intact, it seems to be moth-eaten from inside. Time and time again, the mask of unity slips to reveal the ugly visage of adversary between the president's men and deputy-and-vice-president's men.

Call it a reshuffle as do party president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik's apologists, or a witch-hunt, as do Chua's apologists, the fact remains that the issue aggravates the impasse between Ling and his deputy, Datuk Lim Ah Lek although both have pledged that they will work together for the sake of party unity.

Ling is impugned as a man intent on frontally challenging and removing those who supposedly hobbled him from within, diluting his influence for the party elections next year. And Chua is accused of trying to politically assassinate Ling. But stripped of all contextual hues, Chua's removal is an internal matter that is devoid of further potential for political mobilisation and manoeuvre. The point is simple: It is the prerogative, albeit responsibly exercised, of the president to make or undo appointments of state chieftains. Time will judge the sincerity of his decision. But as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said it was his understanding that Chua was appointed the Kedah chief because there were problems within the MCA in the State. However, the problems have since been resolved and thus, Chua could be replaced by a local man.

Both Ling and Chua are politicians of high national stature. They know the importance of closing ranks and engaging in a constructive process of dialogue. But if the schism in MCA deepens, it is likely to impinge on the party's inner mechanisms and, being the second largest component of BN, this will risk the unravelling of the ruling coalition in the 2004 general election.

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