

PM tries to 'heal' MCA before he goes on holiday

By FOONG PEK YEE and SA'ODAH ELIAS

PETALING JAYA: Rival MCA leaders have met Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad over the past few days, in an apparent move to ensure that the coming MCA elections will be a smooth one, before the Prime Minister goes overseas for a month-long working trip-cum-vacation beginning tonight.

MCA president Datuk Seri

Dr Ling Liong Sik met Dr Mahathir on Monday, together with vice-presidents Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn and Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting for over an hour.

On Wednesday, he met deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek, who was accompanied by vice-president Datuk Chan Kong Choy and youth chief Datuk Ong Tee Keat at Putrajaya.

Dr Mahathir, who is Barisan Nasional chairman, said he had been asked to mediate

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between what had been known as Team A and Team B within the party.

"I am still thinking how to help resolve the problem. Some people are of the opinion that as Barisan chairman, I should try to resolve this problem," he told reporters after opening Pasarakyat at Jalan Imbi.

He said that he met separately with leaders of the two teams at his office in Putrajaya to enable him to

understand better the crux of their problems.

"I met them separately because they wanted me to hear their side of the story," he added.

Asked how he viewed the problem within the party, Dr Mahathir said it was not a major problem and every political party would face such hitches at one time or another.

He also expressed confidence that the problem could be resolved amicably.

Sources said the message put across was that "if a fight cannot be avoided, it must be a clean and credible fight" and both sides agreed that efforts must be made to ensure transparency in the election process.

MCA officials said Dr Mahathir advised them to stop the media war in the run-up to the party polls, expected in June.

The last time both groups met Dr Mahathir was on New

Year's Eve.

On Tuesday, Dr Ling announced that the membership list containing over one million members in some 4,000 branches who were eligible to take part in the party elections would be put up for inspection for 21 days starting middle of this month.

In an unprecedented move, Dr Ling said the inspection period, which was usually between five and six days,

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would be extended to 21 days and this was to give members ample time to scrutinise the list in all branches.

Dr Ling said the party election steering committee, headed by secretary-general Datuk Seri Dr Ting Chew Peh, would take action to rectify any proven discrepancy, including deletion of names of phantom members if there were any.

Dr Ling also said he would set up an independent panel of members and non-members to ensure that the election steering committee would take all steps to ensure a smooth election if there was a call for such

a panel.
Yesterday, Lim welcomed the setting up of the panel to verify the authenticity and validity of the membership list.

"This is important because as Dr Ling said, we want to uphold and protect the integrity and credibility of the party.

"There should be no room for phantom members," he said in a press statement.

Lim said there was a need to verify the figures of more than 4,000 branches and over one million members, adding that there was concern over the large number of members approved within the last six months in 2001.