

Blanket gag order on MCA crisis

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SHAH ALAM, Sun. -- Barisan Nasional chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has issued a gag order which bars "everyone" including himself from making further statements about the MCA crisis.

The Prime Minister demonstrated the seriousness of this ban today by refusing to answer questions from reporters on the MCA issue.

"No statement on the MCA is to be made by anybody, including myself. All of us have agreed to this," he said, explaining that both MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek had agreed to the ban.

Asked if he had met Lim yesterday after his meeting with Dr Ling on a peace plan for the troubled party, the Prime Minister refused to answer. (Lim yesterday said he was still waiting for an appointment to meet the Prime Minister.)

Dr Mahathir also refused to make public the details of the peace plan.

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Dr M: I am sworn to secrecy and silence

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Asked today if he would speak on the MCA peace plan upon his return from abroad on April 21, Dr Mahathir said he did not know. (The Prime Minister leaves tomorrow for official visits to Morocco, Libya and Bahrain.)

Asked how long the blanket gag order would remain, Dr Mahathir said he did not know.

The date of Dr Mahathir's scheduled return is the date of the controversial Extraordinary General Meeting, called for by the MCA's Team B faction.

Despite the party declaring the EGM unconstitutional (for falling to meet the one-third written support from central delegates), Team B is to press ahead with it in a bid to stop the ongoing party elections. Team B wants a committee to replace the party's election steering committee.

When asked if reports by the Chinese Press were true that he had told Team B

to call off the EGM, Dr Mahathir covered his mouth with his hand to signal his silence.

"I am sworn to secrecy and silence," he said. "I am sure you all are disappointed."

The Prime Minister was speaking at a Press conference after attending a charity golf luncheon to raise funds for the Yayasan Pembangunan Masyarakat Kubang Pasu (YPMKP) and the Yayasan Bestari Kuala Langat (YBKL).

Dr Mahathir, who is also Kubang Pasu MP, is patron of the YPMKP. His wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali is the organisation's advisor. Both welfare groups provide services for senior citizens, orphans and poor students.

Current projects include the *Jejak ZJ*, a free tuition programme for needy Form Four and Five students. Another project is the Cyber Village that provides the community with IT infrastructure and training.

Many corporate leaders participated

in the golfing event held at the Pan Pacific Glenmarie Golf and Country Club.

Among the top corporate donors were the Arab-Malaysian Banking Group and MK Land Holdings Bhd, which donated RM150,000 each.

When speaking to the Press, Dr Mahathir said Pas organ *Harakah* had the right to hold a poll on who should be his successor. (Pas has conducted the online poll twice.)

On the presence of Singaporeans at the lighthouse on Pulau Pisang, off Pontian in Johor, he said although the island belonged to Malaysia, Singapore had been given the right to operate the lighthouse under a bilateral agreement.

Separately, Lim, when contacted, welcomed the gag order as it would give both factions a cooling-off period while giving Dr Mahathir time to resolve the MCA crisis.

"We should all heed the Prime Minister's advice and stop issuing statements which would damage the party further."