

POLLS IN MAY

STAR 22 APR 2002

MCA divisional elections postponed but party polls to proceed as scheduled

By FOONG PEK YEE
and SA'ODAH ELIAS

KUALA LUMPUR: The MCA national elections in June will proceed as scheduled but the nomination and election for its 166 divisions have been postponed as efforts are being made to end the party leadership crisis.

The central committee is expected to meet at the MCA headquarters today to fix the date for the divisional election, to be held within the next three weeks.

Nomination for the divisional polls was supposed to be carried out yesterday and polling on Saturday and Sunday.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the postponement of the divisional polls was to

provide time to explain to the grassroots Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's agenda for peace and stability for the party.

"We had a lengthy discussion and reached broad agreement as to how to explain and implement the Prime Minister's agenda.

"For the larger interest of peace and stability in the MCA, I must emphasise that sacrifices will have to be made sometimes," he said, adding that details of Dr Mahathir's plan would be discussed today.

Dr Ling, who heads Team A, met Dr Mahathir and his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, for about an hour in the Prime Minister's Office in Putrajaya.

The Transport Minister said he

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wanted members to understand and support three steps — that the MCA constitution for party elections be adhered to, nomination for divisions be postponed and the PM's agenda for peace and stability be explained to the ground.

Asked how much of the peace plan would be revealed, Dr Ling said it would be “unfolded in stages.”

“The central committee will discuss and use its wisdom to decide and approve as to what level we can explain to the grassroots at this point in time,” he told a press conference at Wisma MCA.

Also present were headquarters elections steering committee chairman Datuk Seri Dr Ting Chew Peh and vice-presidents Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn and Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting.

There have been speculations that the agenda included keeping the leadership status quo at division and national level to maintain party unity.

Team B, led by deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek, had attempted to stop the elections with an extraordinary-general meeting, saying the new membership list of 137,500 members was tainted with phantom members.

The controversial EGM which did not get the written support of a third of the MCA central delegates was scheduled to be held at Putra World Trade Centre last Sunday but was cancelled last Friday.

Talks were then held involving the two factions, businessmen Tan Sri Lim Kok Wing and Tan Sri Lee Kim Yew, and aides of the Prime Minister.

A memorandum, purportedly based on Dr Mahathir's agenda of peace and unity was prepared by Kok Wing and signed by Ah Lek.

It is understood that the rescheduling of the divisional elections was one of the three main items in a memorandum on the Prime Minister's agenda to bring an end to the MCA

squabble. The other two are that the status quo be maintained at all party levels and the cancellation of the EGM called by Team B.

But on Monday, Dr Ling was reported to have said that some of the proposals contained in the memorandum already signed by Team B were not constitutional.

He was quoted as saying that he did not sign the memorandum because it was different from the one proposed by Dr Mahathir on April 13.

The calling off of elections from the divisional level onwards is said to be the sticky point, leading to Team A leaders' reluctance to sign the document as Dr Ling reportedly confirmed that the cancellation of the elections was one of the items considered unconstitutional.

Yesterday, Dr Ling expressed confidence that they could work out details in the next three weeks because the principles had been agreed upon.

Under Article 167 of the party constitution, every branch, division and general assembly shall hold a general election of its office bearers once every three years.

The party's last triennial elections were in 1999, with division polls for Youth and Wanita on May 15 and that of the parent body the next day.

Dr Ling said elections at the state and national level would not be affected because there was sufficient time to hold them despite the postponement at the division level.

Dr Ting apologised to grassroots leaders and members nationwide for the inconvenience and confusion following the “sudden and temporary disruption” in the divisional nominations.

Elections had concluded at 3,965 branches early this month. State elections will be held in May and the national level elections on June 27 and 28.

Earlier, on arrival at Kuala Lumpur International Airport

after having been away from the country for a week, Dr Mahathir said he would have to talk with the relevant people in MCA before making any statement on the matter.

Dr Mahathir, who issued a gag order on the MCA problems on April 14, said: “Want to ask (questions on MCA)? Whether I want to answer or not is a different matter.”

Asked whether the MCA crisis had derailed his plans for an early general election, Dr Mahathir, who is the Barisan Nasional chief, said: “The answer is of course no answer.”

He, however, said all crises would be resolved in the end.

Dr Ling and Ah Lek, who were at the airport to welcome the Prime Minister, were seen shaking hands in the presence of Dr Mahathir, outside the hall shortly after the press conference.

Asked why he did not contact Dr Mahathir to clarify matters when the Prime Minister was abroad, Dr Ling said he did not think that it would be easy “to talk long distance.”

Queried on the nomination process, he said: “According to what I am told, everything is constitutional. Everything is in order and it should go on.”

Asked who initiated them to shake hands, Dr Ling said “The Prime Minister,” adding that it signified a wish that unity and co-operation should begin.

Ah Lek, who spoke to reporters separately, said Team B was all for resolving the crisis as soon as possible.

“Our main concern is to find an acceptable solution as soon as possible to protect the interest of the Chinese community and the unity within Barisan,” he added.

He said Team B was confident that Dr Mahathir, with his wide experience, would be able to help resolve the problem.