

Major reshuffle leaves small ripples

Commentary **STAR** 31 AUG 2002
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THERE is an uneasy calm after the major reshuffle in MCA on Thursday which saw six new state chiefs and a new disciplinary committee.

There is no hue and cry over the dropping of deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek as the party's disciplinary committee chairman.

A political analyst pointed out that the reshuffle had given a lot of food for thought, especially with talks of an approaching general election gaining momentum by the day.

"It is also a reminder that democracy is still alive in the party," he said, referring to the overwhelming majority vote by the 41-member central committee in support of the appointment of veterans in the disciplinary committee.

"It also shows that the president, who is empowered by the party constitution to make appointments, including that of state chiefs, is in control and that merit still counts."

Except for a few press statements by Lim's supporters, there was no protest from the key opponents of party president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik.

Three of the six states involved in the reshuffle were seen as important states in terms of party strength and also for the general election - Johor, Selangor and Penang.

Dr Ling, who was heading Johor

Selangor, has handed over the helm to Datuk Dr Chua Soi Lek and Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting respectively.

Hardly 24 hours after the president's announcement, 18 of the 20 divisions in Johor expressed full support for Dr Chua while 14 of the 17 divisions in Selangor did the same for Ong. Other new state chiefs are Datuk Chor Chee Heung (Perlis), Wong Kam Hoong (Penang), Datuk Hon Choon Kim (Negri Sembilan) and Datuk Poh Ah Tiam (Malacca).

A party observer said that state chiefs were deemed to be influential over matters like appointments of district and municipal councillors and also candidates for the general election. "Thus, it certainly does not pay to antagonise them," he said.

While the appointment of state chiefs is an important matter, the talk within the MCA circle is focused on the fate of Lim following the decision to revamp the disciplinary committee.

Lim, the only one protesting against his dropping, was removed together with the other disciplinary committee members - vice-presidents Datuk Chua Jui Meng and Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn, Youth chief Datuk Ong Tee Keat and Wanita chief Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen.

Chua and Ong were in Team B led by Lim while Dr Fong and Dr Ng were in Team A led by Dr Ling during the 14-month-long leadership tussle

that ended in May when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad stepped in with a peace plan.

Speaking on the rationale for the revamp, a senior leader from Perak pointed out the need for the committee "to be impartial, seen to be impartial and also set a good example."

"There are over 50 disciplinary cases pending since the start of the crisis last year," he said.

Meanwhile, a party insider said that the status quo agreement was to avoid a bitter fight during elections and did not necessarily cover all appointed posts.

In the reshuffle, Dr Ling also retained seven state chiefs, six national bureau chiefs, secretary-general Datuk Seri Dr Ting Chew Peh, treasurer-general Tan Sri William Chek and national organising secretary Datuk Ong Ka Chuan.

A senior party leader also said it was not unusual to have veterans in the disciplinary committee, citing the case of Umno as a good example.

But in any event, the reshuffle was a case of winners-don't-take-all and losers-don't-lose-a. Those aligned to Lim and were reappointed included vice-president Datuk Chan Kong Choy (as Pahang liaison committee chief), Datuk Fu Ah Kiow (religious bureau chief) and Datin Paduka Dr Tan Yee Kew (central committee member).