

# Going by the code of conduct

Comment by FOONG PEK YEE

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TODAY, perhaps, will mark the end of the MCA drama when the party's presidential council gives their thumbs-up for the long-overdue code of conduct proposed by its disciplinary board.

For over a year, certain party leaders and members have openly hurled accusations at their opponents, staged protests over party matters or decisions, disclosed confidential talks and private promises via press conferences, plunging the 53-year-old party into one of its worst crisis.

It came to the point that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who heads the Barisan Nasional coalition of which the MCA is a member, had to step in with a peace plan in April.

While the disciplinary procedures and types of punishment are quite clear in the party constitution, those involved in the mud-slinging had

somehow escaped the law, with over 50 cases still pending.

Article 124.1 of the party constitution stated suspension and/or expulsion among the punishments for members whose acts adversely affect the policies or interests of the party.

The backlog of cases, perhaps, can be traced to differing interpretations over the validity of complaints.

In fact, many of those involved had justified their public misconduct in the name of transparency and upholding party dignity.

In the wake of such ambiguity, a code of conduct spelling out clearly the dos and don'ts would probably help. The code should include a list of channels for complaints or criticisms and resorting to anything not in the list would automatically be deemed as having contravened the party constitution, irrespective of whether the complaints are legiti-

mate or otherwise.

For instance, airing complaints in public like having road shows or press conferences or lodging police reports would be deemed improper if not counter-productive, noted a senior party leader.

He reckoned that a code would put an end to such despicable acts as repeated advice had fallen on deaf ears besides eroding the party's image or authority in the eyes of the public. The code, applicable across the board, should be widely publicised for the benefit of members when upholding party discipline.

The members will also be able to judge the behaviour of leaders if the latter still chose to contravene it.

"You can pride yourself as saviour of the party or community to justify your acts but once you contravene the code, you are subjected to the party constitution," said a political observer.