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Unity vital for party, says Dr Ling

DATUK Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said unity within the MCA was paramount if the party wanted to become a valued partner within the Barisan Nasional.

The party president said it was necessary that unity remain intact as MCA had opponents who would capitalise on its internal problems.

"We face opponents outside BN who will seek to take advantage of any dissension and disunity," said Dr Ling when opening the 49th MCA annual general assembly.

The AGM held at the MCA's Dewan San Choon was opened by Prime Minister and BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Ling also thanked Dr Mahathir for helping resolve MCA's "leadership crisis".

"The MCA would like to place on record its deepest appreciation to Dr Mahathir for his guidance and advice in resolving the internal problems within the party," he said, referring to Dr Mahathir's intervention at the height of the crisis and the peace plan that the Prime Minister initiated to bring together the feuding parties.

Dr Ling said BN component parties had worked together in many areas and would continue to work closely for the benefit of the nation and its multi-racial population.

A clear case of the close co-operation within BN, he added, was the coalition's victories in past by-elections.

These included winning in Indera Kayangan where the candidate was from MCA and Ketari, with a much bigger majority and also the recapturing of Pandang parliamentary seat from Pas and the narrow margin by which BN lost in the Anak Bukit state by-election.

"This showed that the people have given strong support to BN's agenda of economic and social development.

"Above all, the electoral victories reflected the strong support for the leadership of Dr Mahathir," said Dr Ling, adding that the people acknowledged that the bold decisions and prudent policies of the Government were factors which helped the country survive its economic difficulties and political crises.

He said BN, under the chairmanship of Dr Mahathir had proven itself as a party that leads - for independence, for forging national unity, development and a party to face a globalising world and the future.

Dr Ling said although MCA and the nation still needed Dr Mahathir's leadership, the party respected his decision to retire and in handing over the helm to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"MCA pledges the same full and undivided support it steadfastly gives to Dr Mahathir," he added.

Dr Ling also said that as part of the government, MCA would continue to emphasise education and work closely with the private sector in transforming the country into a knowledge-driven economy.

The opening of Tunku Abdul Rahman College's fifth campus in Sabah, which is also the first outside the peninsula last month, was to make educational opportunities accessible to more people.

More opportunities were also made available with the opening of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman recently, he added.

Dr Ling said MCA was also giving attention to small and medium-sized industries as both sectors were facing competition for markets and investments.

The MCA economic bureau, complemented by its Youth and Wanita wings, he added, were spearheading the party's efforts in assisting the government achieve full and speedy economic recovery.