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Ling-Seats/(With Pix)/BM

REQUESTS FOR EXTRA SEATS SHOULD BE MADE BEHIND CLOSED DOORS - DR LING

JOHOR BAHRU, Sept 29 (Bernama) -- Requests for additional seats by Barisan Nasional (BN) component parties should be made behind closed doors and not in public, MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said today.

He said the decision to increase or reduce seat allocations to a BN component party was made on the discretion of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also BN chairman, who understood well the position of a party.

"The final decision will be made by Dr Mahathir. He always listens to the reasons and rationale for additional seats from the parties concerned," he told reporters after opening Gerakan Belia Bersatu Malaysia's 26th annual general meeting, here.

Dr Ling said this when asked to comment on the statement by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday that BN component parties should not squabble in their bid to secure additional seats in the next general election due in 2004.

Under the redelineation of electoral boundaries, the Election Commission had proposed 25 additional parliamentary and 59 state seats.

Dr Ling, who is Transport Minister, said BN components should hold discussions on additional seats behind closed doors and MCA would submit its request for extra seats soon.

"Discussions are underway...it's an internal matter," he said when asked when MCA would forward its request.

He also said MCA, since from the start, had given top priority to education for the youths in this country.

"Education is the most worthwhile investment, every dolar you spend, you improve a life, it is really a sunrise industry. So, we have to spend most of our energy for education," he said.

He said the party hoped to open Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (Utar) branches in Kedah and Johor early next year besides establishing twinning programmes with foreign universities, including in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia.

"So, the students will have a very wide choice in education ...they can go to US and UK to further their studies. Recently, we have also bought over one university in Perth, Australia," he said.

Earlier, in his speech, Dr Ling said the four important core factors that led to Malaysia's progress were education, training, planning and unity.

"Malaysia is a multi-racial country. The features of diversity in our society is the source of our success.

"As a result of the people's cooperation and dynamism, we have become an exemplary nation to the countries in the world," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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