

Focus on polls

STAR

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Dr M: MCA can now gear up for general election

BY LEONG SHEN-LI

KUALA LUMPUR: The MCA should focus on the general election now that its problems have been solved, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister and Barisan Nasional chairman said he was confident that under the leadership of MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting and his deputy Datuk Chan Kong Choy, the party would go back to how it was before and contribute towards a victory for the Barisan.

"The focus from now on is the general election," he said in his speech when opening the MCA's 50th annual general assembly at the party's headquarters yesterday.

Dr Mahathir urged the MCA to prepare for the elections with other component parties, especially its "younger brother," Gerakan.

"Abang tentu sayangkan adik. Dan adik pula, janganlah buat kacau. (An elder brother would sure love his younger sibling. And the younger brother on the other hand should not cause trouble)," he said to applause and cheers from the packed hall.

Dr Mahathir stressed that everything concerning the elections, including the selection of candidates, would be decided by the Barisan.

"When a decision is made, questions on who should be the candidate and which seats each party gets no longer arise," he said.

He said that irrespective of race or the person's party, those chosen should be regarded as Barisan candidates and as

members of the coalition, all component parties should give their full support to him or her.

Dr Mahathir also urged MCA members to forget about what had happened

for the past two years.

"There is no benefit in keeping such things in the heart. We all belong to one faction. All MCA members are Chinese who belong to the MCA, and not to any

particular person," he said.

He said that although there were still a few who did not accept the party's peace plan, they would soon see the

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Dr M: Ling, Ah Lek sacrificed themselves for good of MCA

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error of their ways and subscribe to the unity of the party.

"MCA does not exist for its leaders, but its leaders exist for MCA," he said.

Dr Mahathir congratulated previous party president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and his deputy president Datuk Seri Lim Ah Lek for sacrificing themselves for the good of the party, saying that this was an honourable act.

He said because MCA was Umno's closest partner, whatever happened to one party would affect the other.

"Bila MCA sakit, Umno demam

dan Barisan pening kepala. Bila Umno sakit, MCA demam dan kita semua pening kepala (When MCA is sick, Umno will suffer from fever and the Barisan will have a headache. When Umno is ill, MCA will have a fever and we all will have a headache)," he said.

He added that the Barisan, which had saved the country from racial discord and had allowed the country to develop, was so successful that the Opposition was now trying to copy it by having a pact among themselves.

"However, their pact is different from ours. While they co-operate in front, behind they

conspire.

"There is no honesty among them. People say theirs is not a marriage, but *khalwat* (close proximity)," he said to raucous laughter from the crowd.

The speech will be Dr Mahathir's last address to the MCA annual general assembly as Prime Minister as he is due to step down from his post in two months.

Also present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, leaders of other Barisan component parties, former MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and his deputy Datuk Seri Lim Ah Lek and MCA veterans.