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Mahathir-MCA

BN READILY ACCEPTS NEW MCA APPOINTMENTS

PENANG, May 24 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today welcomed the appointment of Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting as the new MCA president and Datuk Chan Kong Choy as his deputy.

Dr Mahathir, who is Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman, expressed confidence that the new MCA leaders would be able to discharge their duties well even though they were young as they had vast experience after having served the party and the government.

He said that the BN readily accepted the appointment of the two leaders and hoped that the new appointments would strengthen the unity of the party which was embroiled in a leadership crisis for some time.

"It's true that they're young, but they have vast experience, having been in the party for a long time and used to serving in the government," he told reporters here when asked to comment on the appointment of Ong and Chan to the MCA's two top posts.

The party's Central Committee (CC) announced their appointments last night after failing to persuade both Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and Datuk Lim Ah Lek from withdrawing their resignation as party president and deputy party president respectively.

Ong, 47, the party's vice president and Presidential Council member, has been a Ling supporter in what was called Team A while Chan, 48, also a vice president and Presidential Council member, has been aligned to Lim's Team B.

Their appointments took effect immediately and valid until the party election in 2005.

Dr Mahathir said that the BN readily accepted their appointments as it was the decision of the MCA and as far as the BN was concerned, there was only one MCA.

"We surely accept (their appointments). That's the decision of the MCA...as far as we're concerned, there is no such thing as two MCAs, only one. We don't recognise (Team) A or B.

"What we know now is that there is a new MCA president and a new MCA deputy president. And that's the MCA for us," he told a media conference after meeting Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah who is on a three-day visit to Penang.

Asked whether Dr Ling will be retained as Transport Minister, Dr Mahathir said that he would think about the position of the former MCA president in the Cabinet.

"We'll think about it...we'll see," he said.

Asked whether the resolution to the MCA leadership crisis was truly effective to mend the rift in the party, Dr Mahathir hoped that it would help strengthen the MCA.

"Let's hope they will, but as far as we're concerned, we've regarded it as the internal problem of the MCA. As far as we're concerned, there is no Team B, C or D," he said.

As to whether the resolution to the MCA crisis will pave the way for the general election to be held earlier than next year, he said in jest: "The election can always be held earlier...if you want it earlier, it can be held earlier, if you want it later, it can be held later."

Asked whether the BN was prepared for the election following his retirement in October, Dr Mahathir said that it would then be up to the new Prime Minister, who is now his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"After my retirement, it will no longer be my responsibility. Ask Pak Lah (Abdullah), why ask me," he said.

Meanwhile, Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon today congratulated Ong and Chan on their new party appointments.

He hoped that the new generation leaders would inject new commitment and vision for the party as well as the BN.

He was confident that both leaders would contribute to the stability of the MCA and progress for the BN and the nation.

Koh, who is Gerakan vice president, also congratulated Ling and Lim for their determination in resolving the MCA crisis.

"I believe I will be able to work closely with (Ong) Ka Ting and (Chan) Kong Choy in the interest of the BN in general and for Penang specifically," he said.

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