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Most incumbents likely to be retained for polls

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Almost all 98 MCA Members of Parliament and State Assemblymen will be retained in the next general election as part of the party's peace plan drawn up in 2002 to resolve the then Team A-Team B split.

MCA insiders said while there was no specific provision in the plan on candidate selection, the party's top leadership is expected to abide by the "status quo" spirit of the accord.

"This is necessary to ensure peace and stability. MCA cannot afford to be split during the general election," a central committee member said.

Under the former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad-brokered MCA peace accord, elected MCA office-bearers from the divisional-level upwards were retained in the 2002 triennial party polls.

This resulted in almost all MCA leaders elected for the 1999-2002 term being returned unopposed for another three years. Only Youth leaders who had reached the 45-year age limit had to give up their posts.

The peace plan was a culmination of the three-and-a-half-year crisis involving then MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, who headed Team A, and his deputy Datuk Seri Lim Ah Lek, who led Team B.

The source said since those picked to stand for the general election were usually senior leaders at the divisional, State and national levels, there would also be minimal changes in the candidates list.

"Besides, if there is too many changes in the list, those not selected will claim that it is due to partisan politics, even if it is not. We do not want this to happen," he said. "Most incumbents are performing very well anyway."

In the 1999 general election, MCA fielded 35 candidates for Parliament seats and won 28. Of the 77 MCA State candidates, 68 won. The number of MCA State Assemblymen subsequently increased to 70 following the defection of Lim Boo Chang (Datuk Keramat) and Lim Chien Aun (Bayan Lepas) who stood on the Gerakan ticket.

Nevertheless, a Selangor MCA liaison committee member said not all incumbents would stand as some expressed intention to quit politics, including Dr Ling (Labis MP), former Malacca MCA chairman Datuk Wira Gan Boon Leong (Duyong Assem-blyman) and former Penang MCA chairman Tan Sri Dr Sak Cheng Lum (Bagan Jermal Assemblyman).

Replacement candidates for the new seats under the Election Commission's re-delineation exercise is expected to be jointly decided by MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting and his deputy Datuk Seri Chan Kong Choy.

"Last Tuesday, the central committee gave the mandate to the party's top leadership to decide on the candidates. This was a departure from the party's tradition where only the president had the final say. Now, both Ka Ting and Kong Choy will jointly vet the list before submitting it to the Barisan Nasional leadership," he said.