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Consolidating stability

THE resignations of MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and his deputy, Datuk Seri Lim Ah Lek, are not political bombshells. The process is part of the peace deal brokered by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to end the party's 14-month leadership crisis.

The subterranean conflict in MCA needs no retelling. Enough swords have been drawn to leave the public with the impression of irreconcilable strife between the two factions - Team A, which comprises Dr Ling's supporters and Team B, which supports Lim.

The resignation is the product neither of cowardice, nor courage, nor political weakness. Much as the party does not want to go through the trauma of the simultaneous retirement of its president and deputy president, there appears to be no other alternative.

The resignations - which do not see either Dr Ling or Lim manipulating puppets from behind the curtain - are a forthright response to the internal conflict threatening the party. Reneging on their promise to resign, even if at the behest of the supporters, would be self-defeating.

We believe both Dr Ling and Lim know this.

Of course, melodrama is not unknown in MCA. Without casting aspersions on any group, the central committee's initial rejection of the resignations seems a well-rehearsed affair. Whether it is a drama of bereavement, the fact remains there is no mayhem. This indicates the committee's cool and collected mindset, which is aware of the wisdom underlying the decisions of Dr Ling and Lim.

Having seen the best of both men, it is natural the committee finds their going an ineffably sad occasion. Both Dr Ling and Lim have contributed tremendously, not only to MCA, but also to Barisan Nasional.

Some in the party may now be sharpening their knives for a future struggle over leadership. But it is likely the committee will opt for a course that puts party interest above all else. The party's political fortunes are entirely bound up with how the committee acts to strengthen unity. In not reversing their decision, both Dr Ling and Lim have shown the public the power of common sense, necessity and humility.