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'Dr M is sensitive to needs of multi-racial country'

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's assurance that the Penang Chief Minister's post will continue to be held by Gerakan shows that the Prime Minister is sensitive to the needs of a multi-racial country, MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting said today.

Ong, who is also Housing and Local Government Minister, said more than half of the population in Penang was Chinese and the State had been having a Chinese Chief Minister all this while.

"Dr Mahathir is sensitive to this. In Barisan Nasional, we practise the spirit of fairness," he said.

He was responding to Dr Mahathir's statement during the Umno general assembly last week that the Penang Chief Ministership would continue to be filled by Gerakan.

During the Umno Youth assembly, several delegates had proposed that Umno be given the Chief Minister's post instead due to what they claimed as the poor situation of Malays in the State.

Penang is the only BN-controlled State where the Chief Minister or Menteri Besar is not from Umno.

Ong added that he had full confidence in the top BN leadership to decide on the Chief Ministership.

Asked whether MCA also wanted to assume the post, Ong said: "MCA will co-operate closely with other BN component parties to ensure a convincing victory in the general election and work hard for the welfare of the Penang people."

MCA is also said to be vying to take over the Penang Chief Minister's post after the 1999 general election. Then, two candidates who contested and won their State seats on the Gerakan ticket resigned from the party and joined MCA.

This left Gerakan with only eight assemblymen in the Penang legislative assembly, compared to MCA's 11. But the BN leadership then decided that the Chief Minister's post would continue to be held by Gerakan.