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MCA changes **won't** affect stability: PM

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by **Husna Yusop** and **Giam Say Khoo**
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: The leadership changes in MCA in October will not affect the party's stability because its members will know what is best for them, Prime Minister and Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday.

"It is their (MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting's and his deputy Tan Sri Chan Kong Choy's) call. They have decided, so there is no need for speculation," he told reporters after launching the 'Green Earth' programme at Putrajaya's Precinct 9.

On Saturday, both Ong and Chan announced that they would not seek re-election to their positions in the party elections.

Asked whether the two leaders had informed him about their decisions, Abdullah said: "Before this, Ong used to drop hints about something like this. I don't think the development will affect the current political landscape.

"Changes are bound to happen and the press should not speculate. What is important is we take care of our relations with other parties and understand there are other programmes, government programmes, which must be implemented."

MCA vice-president Datuk Donald Lim said the party is in urgent need to find new leaders to steer its reformation into the future.

"Both the president and his deputy are not seeking re-election (in the October party polls). We must look forward and focus on party reform to ensure MCA continues to be relevant," he told *theSun*.

"I respect Ong's and Chan's decisions and I thank them for their contributions to the party. He (Ong) has done his part for the party and it will be recorded in history."

Asked whether Ong's decision is timely, Lim said "that's no more an issue or relevant".

"The next president must have a vision that looks after not only the party but the benefit of a multi-racial society. He must also be fair and uphold justice," said Lim.

"I am sure members will definitely choose the best candidates."

On his plans for the party elections, he said it was too early to tell now and he would make an announcement at an

appropriate time.

Bernama quoted him as saying the contest for the president's post might see a four-cornered fight "based on the sentiments on the ground".

The four in contention, he said, are vice-president Datuk Ong Tee Keat, secretary-general Datuk Seri Ong Ka Chuan and former vice-presidents Datuk Chua Jui Meng and Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek.

"All lips now revolve around those four names because of their influence, experience and tact especially on the agenda to win the confidence of the members following the party's dismal showing in 12th general election in March.

"We can only say that and think about it. But the best, I think, is to let the grassroots decide," Lim told said after attending a leadership dialogue between top MCA leaders and party delegates from Selangor

MCA central committee member Wong Nai Chee said Ong was "forced" to make such a decision probably because of the last general election's (dismal) results and "harsh" criticisms against him, including the snoop squad accusations.

"Ong was helpless in his ambition to reform the party after the electoral defeats. He might be feeling that it was impossible for him alone to alter the status quo, including the perception of the Chinese community on MCA," he said.

"So, I think it is better for him to hand over the baton to a new president."

To a question, Wong said the new president must have a vision to direct the party towards its goal of developing a society that benefits all races.

"The new president must also be able to reunite the party from top to bottom and improve our party image as a vocal party with principles," he said.

On the possible candidate to succeed Ong, Wong said: "Now is not the time to speculate as the party has yet to undergo its divisional elections.

"Ong made his announcement probably because he wanted hopefuls to have time to prepare for the divisional and central elections.

"At the same time, he did not want to spoil the planning of the hopefuls because if he announced it too late, the elections will become chaotic as the hopefuls will have insufficient time to prepare."