

Organisers say Soi Lek-Guan Eng debate not racially motivated
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By Lisa J. Ariffin

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 17 — MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek and DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng's debate tomorrow on the future of the Chinese community in Malaysian politics is not racially motivated, its organisers said today.

"There is nothing racial about it; it's a national conference consisting of many topics and issues that cover all ethnic groups," Asian Strategic Leadership Institute (ASLI) director Datuk Michael Yeoh said at a press conference here.

"It (the conference) looks at [the changing of our political structure] and concerns all issues ... (that) every Malaysian should be concerned about," he added.

Yeoh said the debate, themed "Chinese at a Crossroads. Is the 2 Party System Becoming a 2 Race System?", was originally to be conducted in English, but was changed to Mandarin following Lim's request.

"Guan Eng asked, why is a Chinese topic not conducted in [Mandarin]? So we have decided the whole debate will be in [Mandarin]," Asli senior vice-president Ng Yeen Seen explained.

"The (rest of the) conference will be conducted in English, but if the floor wishes to ask questions in [Mandarin], then the speakers will use Mandarin to answer," she added, saying that most speakers are bilingual.

Ng acknowledged the debate as "the highlight of the conference", where members of the public are allowed to pose questions to both leaders.

"However, the questions must be framed in a way both debaters will have to answer, and only in three minutes," Ng said, and urged the public to speak "according to the timeframe and limitation".

Asked how many seats were allocated to the public, Ng said "around 200 to 250".

"(Of) those who registered last week, 90 per cent will be accepted. We give priority to student organisations, NGOs and professional bodies," she said.

"But we also anticipate walk-ins. So we're setting up a big screen outside the hall," she added, saying the conference would allow leaders "from different political divides to share policies and debate on what they don't agree upon".

The debate, scheduled for 5pm tomorrow, will be aired live on Astro's AEC (Channel 301), with a replay to be televised at 11pm the same day.

Viewers may also watch the debate, with Bahasa Malaysia translations, on Astro Awani (Channel 501).

A live stream of the programme will be also available via Astro's BDQ website,
www.astro.com.my/bendiquan.

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