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KUALA LUMPUR, DEC 24 (BERNAMA) -- DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD TODAY DENIED HAVING GIVEN ANY DEADLINE TO THE TWO FEUDING FACTIONS IN THE MCA TO RESOLVE THEIR 10-MONTH-OLD CRISIS.

THE PRIME MINISTER MAINTAINED THAT THE CRISIS WAS AN MCA INTERNAL AFFAIR AND SAID HE WAS STILL HOPEFUL OF A RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM BY THE PARTY ITSELF.

+I HAVE NOT GIVEN ANY DEADLINE CON RESOLVING THE CRISIS). WE HOPE THE CRISIS WILL BE RESOLVED BUT I DID NOT SAY (TO THE MCA) THAT EITHER DO THAT OR GET OUT OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT,+ HE TOLD REPORTERS ON HIS RETURN FROM A 12-DAY VISIT TO LIBYA, EGYPT AND MALI AND PERFORMANCE OF THE +UMRAH+.

EXCEPT FOR VICE-PRESIDENT DATUK LEW SIP HON, NONE OF THE TOP MCA LEADERS WERE AT THE AIRPORT TO WELCOME DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR. EXPELLED VICE-PRESIDENT ENCIK TAN KOON SWAN, WHO HEADS ONE OF THE FACTIONS: WAS AMONG THE VIPS PRESENT,

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR'S DENIAL CAME IN RESPONSE TO THE REPORTED DEADLOCK IN THE NEGOTIATIONS (FOR A SETTLEMENT OF THE CRISIS) CONDUCTED BY BARISAN NASIONAL SECRETARY-GENERAL ENCIK GHAFAR BABA BETWEEN THE FACTION LED BY HCA ACTING PRESIDENT DATUK DRNEO YEE FAN AND THAT HEADED BY ENCIK TAN,

DURING THE PRIME MINISTER'S ABSENCE, ACTING PRIME MINISTER DATUK MUSAHITAM HAD SUGGESTED THAT THE MCA MIGHT FIND IT WORTHWHILE TO TEMPORARILY LEAVE THE BARISAN NASIONAL TO RESOLVE ITS CRISIS,

ASKED WHETHER HE WAS CONSULTED BEFORE THE STATEMENT WAS MADE; DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR REPLIED THAT HE WOULD HAVE A TALK WITH DATUK MUSA TO GET AN ACCURATE PICTURE BEFORE MAKING ANY COMMENT AS HE WAS NOT IN THE COUNTRY THEN AND ONLY LEARNT OF THE MATTER THROUGH NEWSPAPER REPORTS CONVEYED VIA TELEX.

+HOW CAN I MAKE A DECISION ON THAT KIND OF QUESTION IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES I AM NOW IN. SUCH A THING CANNOT BE DISCUSSED ON THE BASIS OF NEWSPAPER REPORTS,+ HE SAID IN REPLY TO ANOTHER QUESTION ON WHETHER HE AGREED WITH DATUK MUSA'S SUGGESTION.

DATUK MUSA HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT HIS SUGGESTION WAS NOT A +GET OUT NOTICE+ TO THE MCA, EXPLAINING THAT THE UMNO LEADERSHIP FELT IT BETTER FOR THE PARTY TO BE OUTSIDE THE BN TEMPORARILY UNTIL THE CRISIS WAS SETTLED.

-TO THIS, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID:+ THAT MAY BE HIS IMPRESSION BUT I HAVE BEEN AWAY ALL THIS TIME.+

HE SAID HE KNEW OF THE DEVELOPMENTS ONLY FROM WHAT WAS REPORTED BY THE PRESS. +YOU SHOULD GIVE ME A CHANCE TO SPEAK WITH HIM ON THIS MATTER BEFORE I MAKE MY COMMENT.+

ON WHETHER HE WAS +SHOCKED+ BY DATUK MUSA'S STATEMENT, THE BARISAN NASIONAL CHAIRMAN REPLIED:+NO, I CANNOT SAY THAT I AM SHOCKED. THERE WAS SOME TALK ABOUT IT BUT THAT IS ALL.

+MAYBE THERE WAS (SUCH A SUGGESTION?. I REALLY DID NOT PAY MUCH ATTENTION. DATUK MUSA AND I ARE NOT TWINS YOU KNOW,+ HE ADDED IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION ABOUT WHETHER THERE HAD BEEN SUCH A FEELING AMONG UMNO LEADERS (ABOUT THE MCA OPTING OUT OF THE BN TEMPORARILY TO PUT ITS HOUSE IN ORDER) BEFORE HE LEFT THE COUNTRY.

HE STRESSED THAT NO SPECIAL MEETING OF THE UMNO POLITICAL BUREAU WAS CONVENED TO DISCUSS THE MATTER OF SOLVING THE MCA CRISIS PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE.

+THERE WAS NO SUCH MEETING. THERE WAS ONLY SOME TALK ON THE MATTER BUT THERE WAS NO OFFICIAL DECISION.+

UMNO BRANCHES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY CAME OUT IN FULL SUPPORT OF DATUK MUSA'S STATEMENT AND DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID HIS DISTINCT IMPRESSION WAS THAT +IT WAS SOMETHING THAT HE (DATUK MUSA) SAID WHICH HAS THE FEELING OF SOME PEOPLE.+

+OF COURSE UMNO BRANCHES NORMALLY REACT TO NEWSPAPER REPORTS AND NEWSPAPER REPORTS ARE USUALLY SLANTED IN ORDER TO CREATE NEWS,+ HE ADDED.

--BERNAMA