

MAHATHIR (BERNAMA EX) R P P

B Y IDZAN ISMAIL

KUALALUMPUR, DEC 22 (BERNAMA) -- PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE IN THE TALKS TO END THE 10-MONTH MCA CRISIS, BARELY 24 HOURS AFTER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD RETURNED FROM HIS OFFICIAL VISIT OVERSEAS. NEWS OF THE PROGRESS WAS CONVEYED TO THE PRIME MINISTER BY EXPELLED MCA VICE-PRESIDENT ENCIK TAN KOONSWAN WHO CALLED ON HIM AT HIS OFFICE THIS MORNING.

+ ENCIK TAN BRIEFED ME ON THE DEVELOPMENTS OF THE MEDIATION EFFORTS TO SETTLE THE MCA'S PROBLEMS. PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE, + DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR TOLD BERNAMA AFTER THE 30-MINUTE DISCUSSIONS.

FORMER MCA CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBER DATUK DR LING LIONG SIK WAS PRESENT AT THE MEETING.

ALTHOUGH THE DETAILS OF WHAT TRANSPIRED AT THE MEETING WERE NOT DISCLOSED, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR WAS VISIBLY HAPPY WITH THE APPARENT SENSE OF COMMITMENT BY BOTH SIDES TO ACHIEVE SOME BREAKTHROUGH IN THE MEDIATION EFFORTS CONDUCTED BY BARISANNASIONAL SECRETARY-GENERAL ENCIK GHAFAR BABA TO RECONCILE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ENCIK TAN'S FACTION AND THAT LED BY ACTING MCA PRESIDENT DATUK DR NEO YEE PAN.

+ I AM, OF COURSE, HAPPY THAT THEY HAVE MADE SOME PROGRESS, + HE SAID.

ALTHOUGH DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR DECLINED COMMENT ON WHETHER THE REPORTED DEADLOCK IN THE NEGOTIATIONS HAD ENDED, A BREAKTHROUGH WAS APPARENTLY IMMINENT WHICH WOULD BE CONDUCIVE FOR AN EARLY SETTLEMENT TO THE PRESENT IMPASSE.

+ ENCIK TAN HAS AGREED TO ISSUE A STATEMENT ON THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS ON THE MATTER, + HE ADDED.

THE PRIME MINISTER, WHO IS ALSO THE BN CHAIRMAN, SAID HE HAD NOT MET DATUK DR NEO AS THE MCA LEADER HAD LEFT FOR A HOLIDAY ABROAD.

EARLIER IN THE MORNING, ALTHOUGH THE STAFFERS AT ENCIK TAN'S AND DATUK DR LING'S OFFICE WERE EVASIVE ABOUT WHAT WAS GOING ON, BERNAMA LEARNT AROUND NOON THAT THE TRIO WERE HAVING A +KUSH-HUSH+ MEETING WITH DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR'S STATEMENT OF SOME PROGRESS BEING MADE IS SEEN BY POLITICAL OBSERVERS AS A SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT BECAUSE HOPES OF AN EARLY SETTLEMENT SEEMED DIM JUST BEFORE HIS RETURN YESTERDAY DESPITE REPORTS THAT THE CRISIS COULD END BY THEN.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR'S STATEMENT YESTERDAY THAT THE CRISIS HAD TO COME TO AN END ALTHOUGH NO DEADLINE HAD BEEN SET SEEMED TO HAVE GALVANIZED THE PARTIES INVOLVED TO STEP UP THEIR EFFORTS TO REACH AN AGREEMENT.

WITH THE BENEFIT OF HINDSIGHT, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER DATUK MUSA'S SUGGESTION THAT THE MCA MIGHT FIND IT WORTHWHILE TO OPT OUT TEMPORARILY FROM THE BN PENDING THE SOLUTION OF THE CRISIS SEEMED TO HAVE HAD THE DESIRED EFFECT OF JOLTING THE FACTIONS INTO SEEKING AN EARLY SETTLEMENT TO THEIR SQUABBLE.

FOLLOWING THAT, PARTY SECRETARY-GENERAL TAN SRI CHONGHON NYAN CAME OUT WITH A POSITIVE STATEMENT THAT THE MCA WOULD EMERGE FROM THE CRISIS + A TOTALLY RECONCILED, UNITED AND MUCH MORE POWERFUL PARTY. +

DATUK DR NEO, MEANWHILE, WAS REPORTED TO BE IN HIGH SPIRITS BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE FOR A HOLIDAY OVERSEAS? INDICATING THAT AN END WAS IN SIGHT TO THE CRISIS WHICH STARTED EARLIER THIS YEAR OVER THE +PHANTOM MEMBERS+ ISSUE AND THE SUBSEQUENT EXPULSION OF ENCIK TAN AND 13 OTHER TOP LEADERS OF THE PARTY.

-- BERNAMA

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