

# PM TO MCA: DON'T REOPEN OLD WOUNDS

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad has called on the two MCA factions to stick to the spirit of the Jan. 30 agreement.

He said although he had been receiving telegrams from party members complaining about breaches in the agreement, he would not want to comment on them for "I believe there is sincerity on both sides."

The leaders should negotiate and compromise, he said, and not bow to pressure from their supporters.

"Differences can be resolved without crushing the other side," he added at a dinner tonight to mark the MCA's 36th anniversary.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan Nasional and Umno president, said that the country had been fortunate in that the different communities and their respective leaders were able to work together.

"However they are sometimes not allowed to do so as a result of pressure from the grassroots.

"Whether these leaders can bring about unity under such pressures will depend on how capable they are.

"It is most easy to allow oneself to be influenced by supporters in order

to be popular. This is not the mark of a true leader. A leader should decide which direction he wants to go and win the confidence of his supporters to follow him," he said.

Dr Mahathir said MCA members should strive to resolve their differences amicably to ensure that the party remained intact.

He appealed to the members not to do anything that would "reopen old wounds which we are trying to heal."

He urged them to solve the problems amicably "so that in the end we will have the whole of MCA and not just half of it.

The party's 10-month feud between the factions of acting president Datuk Dr Neo Yee Pan and Mr Tan Koon Swan ended with the signing of an agreement on Jan. 30.

Dr Mahathir said that the Umno was relieved to see these problems resolved because "we regard the MCA as our closest friend."

"And a split in the MCA affected not only the party itself but also the component parties of the Barisan and the Chinese community.

"The MCA influences decision making as it is in the Government. Without the MCA, the Chinese community

might not have sufficient representation should some issue arise affecting the community," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that while some thought they could be represented by the Opposition, such representation was ineffective. The Opposition could only shout criticisms but could not protect the rights of the Chinese community, he added.

"The Government, on the other hand, always gave due consideration to the MCA because of its special relationship. It was the first party that worked together with Umno in setting up the Alliance which later evolved into the Barisan."

A mark of this special relationship, Dr Mahathir said, was the fact that the leader of the MCA sat next to the Prime Minister in the Cabinet.

"He needs only to whisper to be heard and Dr Neo has been whispering to me continuously," he said with a laugh.

Also present at the dinner were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Musa Hitam, Gerakan chief Datuk Dr Lim Keng Yaik, MIC's Datuk S. Samy Vellu, other Umno and MCA leaders, including honorary life president of the party Tun Tan Siew Sin.