

MARATHON SESSION ON THE MCA

Dr M: I did not ask Neo or Tan to quit

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — The Umno Supreme Council discussed at length today the MCA crisis, including the "talk in town" that the top two leaders have been asked to quit so that the 16-month long party crisis can be resolved.

Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that almost two and a half hours of the five-hour long meeting was taken by discussions on the MCA crisis and its effects on the Barisan Nasional as well as Umno.

He, however, said the council did not come to a decision on the leadership crisis between the factions led by acting MCA president Datuk Dr Neo Yee Pan and Mr Tan Koon Swan.

Dr Mahathir also dismissed reports that he had asked both the leaders to quit the party in an attempt to resolve the crisis.

"I have not asked them to step down. Other people might have. I do not know," he said.

The Prime Minister also dismissed speculation that Datuk Neo, who is scheduled to go on holiday to the United States and Europe next month, was actually going on "leave before retirement."

"We do not have such a provision," Dr Mahathir said.

He added that it was pointless for him to dismiss such speculation as

"rumours are a way of life in this country.

"Whatever explanations I give will not stop the rumours. Everyone has to start rumours, otherwise life will become very uninteresting."

Speaking to reporters after the marathon closed-door meeting, Dr Mahathir said the discussions on the MCA crisis took some time as all Supreme Council members wanted to voice their views on the crisis.

"There were many different views — some needing explanations from me and other leaders here. Our aim in discussing this was to exchange views. That is why the meeting took so long."

Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan

Nasional chairman, stressed that the 30-strong council did not reach any conclusion on the MCA crisis.

The council members only discussed the effects on the coalition and Umno of the friction between the Datuk Neo and Koon Swan factions and did not go into problems within the MCA, he said.

"We are concerned not so much with the party's domestic problems but the effects of the crisis on Umno and the Barisan Nasional."

The Prime Minister said that it was important for Umno, as the main Barisan component party, to focus attention on the consequences that might arise from the problems caused by the crisis.

The meeting also discussed for the first time the political developments in Sabah since the stunning victory in the State elections in April, which saw the fledgling Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) defeating the incumbent ruling Berjaya party.

"We took note of certain developments there," Dr Mahathir said.

"However, we feel that at this stage we do not have to make a stand — especially on the ruling Parti Bersatu Sabah's application to join the Barisan."

Regarding the recent Berjaya party elections, which saw former party secretary-general Datuk Muhammad Noor Mansor being elected as president, Dr Mahathir said that was "an internal matter."

"If they choose Mansor, we will accept their decision," he said.