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LEAD BN-MCA * * * *

BY AMIN HUSAINI HARUN 85

KUALA LUMPUR, AUG 17 (BERNAMA) -- THE MCA HAS ASKED FOR AND BEEN GRANTED A THREE-MONTH GRACE PERIOD BY THE BARISAN NASIONAL SUPREME COUNCIL TO SOLVE ITS INTERNAL CRISIS, FAILING WHICH IT AGREES TO VOLUNTARILY OPT OUT OF THE RULING COALITION.

BN DEPUTY CHAIRMAN DATUK MUSA HITAM ANNOUNCED THIS IN A STATEMENT HE READ OUT TO THE PRESS AFTER A TWO-AND-A-HALF-HOUR MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD AT THE BN HEADQUARTERS HERE TODAY.

THE STATEMENT IN BAHASA MALAYSIA READS: +SELEPAS BERBINCANG DENGAN MENDALAM DENGAN MEMBERI PERTIMBANGAN KEPADA PERKARA YANG BERKAITAN DAN KESANNYA TERHADAP BARISAN NASIONAL SERTA KESTABILAN POLITIK NEGARA, WAKIL MCA YANG TERDIRI DARIPADA DATUK MAK HON KAM DAN DATUK DR NEO YEE PAN TELAH MEMBERI PENGAKUAN BAHAWA MCA AKAN MENYELESAIKAN KRISISNYA DALAM MASA TIGA BULAN DAN SEKIRANYA TIDAK DAPAT MENYELESAIKANNYA DALAM JANGKA MASA TERSEBUT, MCA AKAN MENGUNDURKAN DIRI DARIPADA BN UNTUK TERUS BERUSAHA BAGI MENYELESAIKAN KRISISNYA.+

(AFTER DEEP DISCUSSIONS THAT TOOK INTO ACCOUNT RELATED MATTERS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE BARISAN NASIONAL AS WELL AS NATIONAL POLITICAL STABILITY, THE MCA REPRESENTATIVES COMPRISING DATUK MAK HON KAM AND DATUK DR NEO YEE PAN HAVE GIVEN AN UNDERTAKING THAT MCA WILL RESOLVE ITS CRISIS IN THREE MONTHS, FAILING WHICH IT WILL WITHDRAW FROM THE BN TO CONTINUE EFFORTS TO SEEK A SETTLEMENT.)

BN CHAIRMAN DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD HAD EARLIER SAID THE DISCUSSION ON THE MCA CRISIS HAD THE APPROVAL OF THE TWO MCA REPRESENTATIVES, DATUK MAK AND DATUK DR NEO.

HE THEN ASKED DATUK MUSA TO READ OUT THE PREPARED STATEMENT. -- MORE (ENDS RERUN)

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DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR, WHO IS THE PRIME MINISTER, SAID THE DISCUSSION WAS HELD ONLY AFTER THE ARRIVAL OF THE TWO MCA REPRESENTATIVES, WHO TURNED UP TOGETHER ABOUT 50 MINUTES LATE.

HE SAID THE MEETING TODAY, ATTENDED BY ALL THE COMPONENT PARTIES, AGREED TO THE REQUEST AS +WE ALL BELIEVE THE MCA SHOULD BE GIVEN THE CHANCE TO SOLVE ITS CRISIS.+

AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR, WHO WAS FLANKED ON THE LEFT BY DATUK MUSA AND ON THE RIGHT BY BN SECRETARY-GENERAL ENCIK GHAFAR BABA, ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT DATUK DR NEO HAD +ENDED HIS SERVICE+ AS MINISTER OF HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFECTIVE YESTERDAY AND THAT DATUK MAK HAD TOLD THE MEETING THAT HE IS THE ACTING MCA PRESIDENT.

ASKED WHETHER THE MCA REPRESENTATIVES HAD INFORMED THE MEETING ON WAYS TO RESOLVE THE CRISIS, HE SAID THIS WAS NOT DISCLOSED BUT OBVIOUSLY IT WOULD HAVE TO BE TO THE SATISFACTION OF ALL INVOLVED.

HE SAID THE UNDERTAKING MADE BY THE TWO MCA LEADERS WAS DONE VERBALLY IN THE PRESENCE OF ALL THE BN LEADERS. +THE BN WANTS THIS UNDERTAKING TO BE MADE GOOD.+ -- MORE

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ASKED THE REASON FOR DATUK DR NEO BEING RELIEVED OF HIS CABINET MINISTER POST, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR DECLINED TO DIVULGE ANYTHING, SAYING ONLY THAT IT WAS DONE AS THE PREROGATIVE OF THE PRIME MINISTER.

HE ALSO REFUSED TO COMMENT WHETHER DATUK DR NEO'S REMOVAL WAS MADE BECAUSE HE HAD BEEN SEEN AS THE +STUMBLING BLOCK+ IN THE SEARCH TO END THE CRISIS.

HOWEVER, WHEN FURTHER PRESSED FOR SOME KIND OF REASON, HE SAID HE NOTED THAT THERE HAD BEEN SEVERAL REQUESTS BY SEVERAL QUARTERS PARTICULARLY WITHIN THE CHINESE COMMUNITY FOR DATUK DR NEO TO STEP DOWN AS ACTING MCA PRESIDENT.

ASKED WHETHER IN MAKING THE DECISION (TO TERMINATE DATUK DR NEO'S SERVICE AS MINISTER) WAS DONE AFTER LONG AND HARD THINKING, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR REPLIED: +I NORMALLY THINK HARD AND LONG BEFORE ARRIVING AT A DECISION. I THINK I HAVE DONE THE RIGHT THING.+

THE PRIME MINISTER REVEALED THAT HE MET DATUK DR NEO ON TUESDAY UPON HIS (DATUK DR NEO'S) RETURN FROM HIS VACATION IN SEOUL.

DURING THE MEETING, HE SAID, DATUK DR NEO HAD REITERATED HIS STAND NOT TO STEP DOWN AS MCA ACTING PRESIDENT DESPITE A MOVE BY CERTAIN MCA LEADERS TO ASK HIM TO RESIGN. -- MORE
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LEAD BN-MCA 4 KUALA LUMPUR & & & &

ASKED WHETHER IT WAS TRUE AN MCA DELEGATION HAD GONE TO SEOUL TO ASK DATUK DR NEO TO RESIGN AND WHETHER HE KNEW ABOUT IT, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID HE WAS INFORMED ABOUT IT AND FURTHERMORE THERE WERE SOME MINISTERS WHO NEEDED TO HAVE HIS APPROVAL TO GO OVERSEAS.

ASKED ABOUT HIS FEELINGS ON TERMINATING DATUK DR NEO'S TERM OF OFFICE AS MINISTER, HE SAID: +MY FEELINGS ON THIS ISSUE ARE NOT VERY IMPORTANT. WHAT HAPPENS TO THE NATION, THE MCA, THE CHINESE COMMUNITY AND THE BN IS MORE IMPORTANT.+

ASKED ABOUT DATUK DR NEO'S REACTION TO HIS TERMINATION OF SERVICE, HE SAID DATUK DR NEO APPEARED TO BE CALM AND HE ACCEPTED THE DECISION OF THE PRIME MINISTER.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THE VACANCY LEFT BY DATUK DR NEO WOULD NOT BE FILLED FOR THE TIME BEING.

TO ANOTHER QUESTION ON THE POSITION OF THE OTHER MCA MINISTERS IN THE CABINET, HE SAID THEY WERE STILL THERE. THE REMAINING MCA MINISTERS ARE DATUK MAK HON KAM (LABOUR), DATUK CHIN HON NGIAN (HEALTH) AND TAN SRI CHONG HON NYAN (TRANSPORT).

BESIDE THE FULL MINISTERS, MCA IS ALSO REPRESENTED BY DATUK DR LING LIONG SIK AND DATUK LEE KIM SAI (DEPUTY MINISTERS) AND ENCIK YEOH POH SAN (PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY). -- MORE
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LEAD BN-MCA 5 KUALA LUMPUR * * * *

AS TO WHOM THE BN RECOGNISES AS THE OFFICIAL ACTING MCA PRESIDENT, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID DATUK MAK HAD INFORMED THE MEETING THAT HE WAS NOW THE ACTING MCA PRESIDENT.

+WHO IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE MCA IS BEST SOLVED BY THE MCA MEMBERS THEMSELVES,+ HE ADDED.

HOWEVER, FOR THIS MEETING, BN RECOGNISED BOTH DATUK MAK AND DATUK DR NEO AS THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MCA.

HE QUICKLY STRESSED HOWEVER THAT BN WAS NOT INVOLVED IN DETERMINING THE ELECTION OF ANY MCA LEADER.

HE SAID THAT AS FAR AS HE WAS CONCERNED, HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH ALL FACTIONS IN THE MCA WAS STILL GOOD. +I TALK TO ALL MCA LEADERS AND MEMBERS. I DO NOT ASK THEM FOR THEIR MCA MEMBERSHIP CARD WHEN I WANT TO TALK TO THEM.+

EARLIER WHEN ASKED WHETHER DATUK MAK AND DATUK DR NEO TOLD THE MEETING THE REASON FOR THEM TURNING UP LATE, HE SAID BOTH HAD PROFUSELY APOLOGISED FOR BEING LATE.

+MAYBE THEY WERE TRYING AT THE 11TH HOUR TO SOLVE THE CRISIS. THIS IS JUST MY GUESS,+ HE SAID. -- MORE

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LEAD BN-MCA @ KUALA LUMPUR @ @ @ @

ACCORDING TO SOURCES, BOTH DATUK MAK AND DATUK DR NEO HAD HELD DISCUSSIONS AT THE HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT MINISTRY FOR AN HOUR BEFORE LEAVING FOR THE UMNO BUILDING AT ABOUT 10.40 AM.

ASKED WHAT WILL BE THE RESULT IF AN ELECTION WERE TO BE HELD WITHIN THIS THREE MONTHS IN WHICH THE CRISIS HAS TO BE RESOLVED, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR PREDICTED THAT THE RESULTS WOULD BE GOOD FOR THE BN.

ASKED WHEN THE BN SUPREME COUNCIL WOULD HOLD ITS NEXT MEETING, HE SAID IT WOULD BE HELD IN SARAWAK BUT NO DATE HAD BEEN FIXED YET.

DATUK MAK AND DATUK DR NEO WERE THE LAST TO ARRIVE FOR THE MEETING BUT THE FIRST TO LEAVE THE BN CONFERENCE ROOM WHEN THE MEETING ENDED.

THEY WERE MOBBED BY REPORTERS AND CAMERAMEN WHO SCRAMBLED TO GET CLOSE TO THE MCA LEADERS. THERE WAS A NEAR PANDEMONIUM OUTSIDE THE CONFERENCE ROOM WITH REPORTERS AND CAMERAMEN AND SECURITY PERSONNEL PUSHING EACH OTHER.

MIC PRESIDENT DATUK S. SAMY VELLU WHO WAS BEHIND THE TWO MCA LEADERS WAS HEARD PLEADING TO REPORTERS AND CAMERAMEN TO MAKE WAY FOR THEM, SAYING THAT THEY COULD GET THE NEWS (ABOUT THE MEETING) FROM THE PRIME MINISTER.

THE MASS MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES WERE EARLIER NOT ALLOWED TO GO TO THE FIRST FLOOR OF THE UMNO BUILDING AND HAD GATHERED AT THE MAIN ENTRANCE OF THE BUILDING THROUGHOUT THE MEETING, ATTRACTING ATTENTION FROM PASSERS-BY.

SECURITY AROUND THE BUILDING WAS TIGHT. -- BERNAMA
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