

MCA GETS 3 MONTHS

18 AUG 1985

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — The MCA has agreed to solve its internal crisis within three months or voluntarily withdraw from the Barisan Nasional.

But Datuk Dr Neo Yee Pan, acting president since 1983, has been dropped from the Cabinet — the Prime Minister said today his services had been “terminated” — as Housing and Government Minister. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he felt the Chinese community wanted Dr Neo to step down. This leaves the MCA with three Ministers in the Cabinet with Dr Neo's post being left vacant for the time being.

Hours after the announcement, Datuk Mak Hon Kam's side said Dr Neo had agreed to make way for Datuk Mak, who broke with Dr Neo only a few days ago. But Dr Neo angrily denied that. “Let me reiterate: I have no intention of resigning (as acting president),” he said and said the party constitution did not

ON PAGES TWO A

- Neo and Mak on party's top post
- Ghafar the problem another t
- Why I won't resign — by Neo
- BN dec hailed with relie

allow for an acting president to be replaced until a new president is elected.

The Barisan Nasional Supreme Council has, meanwhile, asked its secretary-general, Encik Ghafar Baba, to resume the job of trying to solve the MCA's other outstanding issue which threw the party into turmoil in the first place 17 months ago. He and his ad hoc committee of six will once again attempt to clean up the membership lists which a third group, supporters of Mr Tan Koon Swan, claimed was padded with non-existent members.

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● How Dr M
broke the
news to Neo

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● Inside BN's
meeting
yesterday

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Today's Supreme Council meeting began without the MCA represented. Forty minutes later, Dr Neo and Datuk Mak turned up at Umno headquarters, where the meeting was being held, in the same car. The Barisan sidestepped having to make a choice as to who was acting president by recognising both as "representatives" of the MCA.

The meeting lasted two-and-a-half hours, after which the Prime Minister and Umno president, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said both Dr Neo and Datuk Mak had assured them the party crisis would be solved in three months.

Umno deputy president Datuk Musa Hitam then read out a prepared statement on the MCA issue. The statement said:

"After deep discussions and considering all the implications of the MCA crisis on the Barisan Nasional and the country's political stability, the two MCA representatives, Datuk Mak Hon Kam and Datuk Dr Neo Yee Pan, have given the assurance that the party will solve its crisis within three months, failing which it will opt out of the coalition and continue to resolve it from outside."

Dr Mahathir then announced that he had "terminated the services" of Dr Neo as Housing and Local Government Minister and that the post would be left vacant for the time being.

It was his prerogative to make this decision as Prime Minister he said, but later added: "I know from Press reports that the Chinese community wants him to step down as acting president of the MCA. The Chinese community at present is divided. A lot of the people (the Chinese) wanted him to step down."

Asked to comment further on finding a solution to the MCA crisis, Dr Mahathir said: "I would like them (MCA members) to resolve things themselves and would not like to give opinions that might somehow or other arouse feelings that otherwise not be aroused."

Asked how Dr Neo's removal from the Cabinet would affect the Chinese community Dr Mahathir said: "I would like to think that I normally think hard and long ... and have made the right decision."

He said that the Barisan decided to recognise Dr Neo and Datuk Mak as "representatives" of the MCA following the "emergency central committee meeting" yesterday after which Datuk Mak, who had supported Dr Neo since the party troubles began, said he had been appointed acting president.

Dr Mahathir said that it was Datuk Mak who suggested three-month deadline not the Barisan and added that as to the question of leadership, it was up to the MCA, not the Barisan, to recognise who should be acting president.

"But Datuk Mak said at the meeting that he is act-

● FROM PAGE ONE

ing MCA president," he said.

Stressing that the MCA was not withdrawing from the Barisan now, he said: "They will do so after the end of three months if they fail to resolve the crisis.

"When they say they (will) resolve (the problem), I believe it relates to all the leadership problems. We do not know how they will go about it. Obviously it must be to the satisfaction of everyone."

He also said that his personal feelings about the MCA crisis were not important. "What is important is the effect it has on the Barisan, the party, the country and the Chinese community as a whole," he said.

On whether the other MCA members in the Cabinet were being retained because they had the support of the Chinese, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know about the support but Datuk Mak, Datuk Chin Hon Ngian and Tan Sri Chong Hon Nyan are still in the Cabinet."

Asked if he was confident the protracted crisis would be resolved within three months, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know. Obviously there must be a time frame. The crisis must end sometime."

"If it was resolved tomorrow then it would be good for the general election results. But even if it's three months from tomorrow, what is the difference?"

The MCA problems started last year when millionaire businessman Mr Tan Koon Swan, a party vice-president, accused the MCA leadership of padding the party's membership lists with non-existent, or "phantom," members to improve their chances of re-election.

Dr Neo sacked Mr Tan and 13 of his supporters. After much mediating, the 14 expelled members were accepted back as ordinary members but they still could not see a way to settling the matter. All parties went to court earlier this year before both sides asked Encik Ghafar to head an ad hoc committee of representatives from both sides to clean up the lists.

● TURN TO PAGE 3