

PM says they were there as MCA 'representatives'

Status of Neo, Mak at meeting

Sun 18 AUG 1985
KUALA LUMPUR,

Sat. — Datuk Neo Yee Pan and Datuk Mak Hon Kam attended the Barisan Nasional council meeting today as "representatives" of the MCA.

They arrived in separate cars about 50 minutes after the council began its meeting at 10am at the Barisan headquarters.

Datuk Mak was yesterday appointed acting president by a meeting of "some central committee members" following Datuk Neo's refusal to step down. His appointment was, however, not recognised by party headquarters.

Asked today who was recognised as the acting party president, BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed said the coalition recognised both Datuk Neo and Datuk Mak as "representatives" of the MCA.

"Datuk Mak has told me he is now the acting president of the MCA.

"The Barisan Nasional is not involved in determining any post in its component parties."

Asked if the Barisan recognised Datuk Mak as the leader of the MCA, the Prime Minister said: "He merely informed me that he is now the acting president of the MCA.

"It is up to the members of the MCA to decide who their leader is."

He denied that his decision to terminate Datuk Neo's term as Cabinet Minister showed his preference for any particular faction in the MCA or indicated an implicit recognition of Datuk Mak's leadership.

"The decision to end Datuk Neo's term in the Cabinet was mine. It has nothing to do with the Barisan.

"I like to think that I normally think hard and long about all decisions. I think and hope I have done the right thing."

Was the decision to remove Datuk Neo from the Government reflective of his belief that the MCA leader was the stumbling block to a resolution of the party crisis?

"I would rather leave it to them ... I do not want to add any kind of opinion which might some way or other, arouse feelings which should not be aroused.

"The Chinese community at the moment is very divided. And the newspapers have reported that a lot of people had wanted him to step down."

The Prime Minister said a group of MCA leaders — among whom were Ministers — went to see him before they left for Seoul to try to get Datuk Neo to resign last week. He said they had to see him because as Ministers, they had to ask for leave.

The last time he met

Datuk Neo before this morning's meeting was on Tuesday — the day after Datuk Neo returned from Korea.

"He explained to me his stand. He said there were moves by some people to get him to resign. He said he would not."

He also cautioned all Barisan Nasional leaders to be careful and avoid any racial undertones in whatever they said.

As to the Barisan leadership's position vis-a-vis the Tan Koon Swan faction in the MCA, Dr Mahathir said he would talk to all MCA members even rank and file.

"We don't ask for their membership cards each time," he said, drawing laughter from the horde of newsmen gathered at the Press conference after the Barisan Nasional Supreme Council meeting.

Earlier, when asked whether Datuk Mak and Datuk Neo told the meeting the reason for their 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.

Datuk Neo and Datuk Mak were the last to arrive but the first to leave the meeting.

They told reporters who rushed out to meet them, in Chinese "to take it slowly."

Asked to comment on the meeting, Datuk Neo said the Prime Minister was giving a Press conference.

To a question about how the two happened to be together, he said: "We are still the official representatives of the MCA."