

**MCA 'phantoms' not
the issue, says Mahathir**

Power tussle 'cause of crisis'

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THE struggle for power between factions in the MCA is the cause of the party's crisis. The blame should not be put on the "phantom members" issue.

The Prime Minister says this in an interview in the latest issue of *Merdeka*, the official organ of Umno.

Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad says the MCA crisis started

**KUALA LUMPUR,
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"It is true there are

and continued because of the struggle for power between two party stalwarts, in an apparent reference to acting president Datuk Dr Neo Yee Pan and former vice-president Tan Koon Swan.

He also denies that the Umno interfered in the MCA crisis and described such talk as a "dangerous ploy" that can endanger all parties concerned.

In a frank discussion of the 18-month-old MCA crisis, Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president and Barisan Nasional chairman, says both factions, in their bid to garner support, are resorting to communal issues by charging that Umno is trying to determine who is to be the MCA president.

"I do not understand why these charges are being levelled against Umno," he said, adding that leaders of both MCA factions had approached him as both Prime Minister and Barisan Nasional chairman but he had stayed out of the party's crisis.

"At first I had considered the MCA crisis a family affair. But when it carried on, it ceased to be a family dispute and became a crisis that threatened to jeopardise the stability of the Barisan Nasional, the Government and the country."

He adds that given this situation, every component of the Barisan Nasional has a right to ensure the crisis does not jeopardise the coalition.

"Umno also voiced its opinion. It is not only Umno but also the other parties which have a right to do so.

"The lies that are being spread about Umno, if left unchecked, can affect the unity and stability of the Barisan Nasional.

those in the MCA who like this crisis to adversely affect the Barisan Nasional as it is possible there are some MCA members who do not agree with the concept of the coalition," Dr Mahathir said.

He says the "phantom member" issue is just an excuse as the MCA crisis began from the struggle for the acting presidency.

He also says that although he was uncertain of the support Datuk Dr Neo commanded in the MCA, he, nevertheless, accepted him as the acting MCA president and the senior MCA Minister in the Cabinet because former party president Datuk Lee San Choon had stepped down.

Interests

Dr Mahathir says a settlement has to be sought so both factions will support a compromise leadership from outside their ranks.

"As far as the country is concerned the MCA crisis has certainly threatened the economic stability and security."

He also says he dropped Datuk Dr Neo from the Cabinet because there was no other way to resolve the MCA crisis.

The Prime Minister feels that a leader should place party interests above self-interests and every leader should be prepared to sacrifice personal interests for the party.

He says despite the fact that he had already explained why he dropped Datuk Dr Neo from the Cabinet, there were certain quarters which were trying to make Umno the scapegoat to gain the support of Chinese chauvinists.

He says the problem is that the MCA does not have an effective leadership.