

Mahathir: Why I dismissed Yee Pan

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Acting MCA president Datuk Dr Neo Yee Pan refused to be "reasonable" and became a threat to Barisan Nasional integrity, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

In an interview with *Merdeka*, Umno's official publication, the Prime Minister said Dr Neo did not wish "to co-operate and assist the BN at all." His (Dr Neo's) participation in the Government, therefore, became meaningless. And for this reason he was dismissed.

Dr Neo held the Housing and Local Government portfolio.

"The Chinese (leaders) who formerly viewed Dr Neo as an obstacle to the solution of the crisis, now allege his dismissal has caused him to adopt a tough stance," he said.

Support

"Furthermore, there were leftist elements that wanted to perpetuate the present crisis by spreading stories that Dr Neo was under pressure from Umno," Dr Mahathir, who is Barisan Nasional chairman, said.

He explained that if Dr Neo continued being the acting MCA president and MCA remained in the coalition, MCA candidates for the coming general election would be nominated by him (Dr Neo).

"The possibility is that these candidates would not get the support of the Malaysian Chinese and they would be defeated. This would affect the Barisan Nasional itself.

"In view of this, it was important that Dr Neo

did not obstruct the solution of the party crisis."

He said he was initially reluctant to dismiss Dr Neo as a Minister even when there were groups in the MCA that felt Dr Neo should be out of the Cabinet.

These MCA groups, he said, were of the opinion that while Dr Neo did not have the support of the majority of MCA members, his position as a Minister served as a form of protection and accorded him a status which did not correspond with his "weakness in leadership".

The Prime Minister said the faction led by Mr Tan Koon Swan then announced he (Mr Tan) would not contest the top party post if Dr Neo did likewise.

He said Mr Tan would give way and make it possible for co-operation between the rival factions after Dr Neo had withdrawn from the contest for the top post.

Efforts were then made to persuade Dr Neo not to contest the MCA presidency.

Dr Mahathir said the withdrawal of Dr Neo from the contest was even more important with the announcement of Mr Tan's followers they would accept Datuk Mak Hon Kam as acting president and Datuk Dr Ling Liong Sik as deputy president.

"But Dr Neo did not want to budge at all despite the urgings of leaders who supported him.

"In this context, Umno then decided to request MCA to temporarily opt out of the Barisan Nasional but the MCA did not agree to this proposal."