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Kong (News Focus)

REBELS UNWELCOME IN COALITION POLITICS

By: Jackson Sawatan

KOTA KINABALU, July 8 (Bernama) -- Datuk Kong Hong Ming is learning the hard way that rebels are unwelcome in Malaysia's coalition politics.

The Kudat state assemblyman was forced to quit the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) after he refused to withdraw his challenge against the leadership of party president Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, now Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, last August.

Kong lost the party contest and was later pressured to resign from the Sabah Cabinet. He then joined Gerakan which appointed him Sabah chairman and a national vice-president.

Now, again, Kong is facing the strong possibility of being expelled as Sabah's Gerakan chief.

In his most recent brush with authority, Kong abstained from voting on amendments to the Forest Enactment, one of five laws passed by the Sabah State Assembly on June 17 to transfer some of the Chief Minister's powers to the Cabinet.

"I did not vote because I felt that the amendments were not necessary at the moment. There are many other ways to check the Chief Minister's powers, including using the Penal Code, Prevention of Corruption Act and the like," he said when commenting on his action.

Kong was absent from the House when vote was taken on the other four bills.

"I am responsible for my action. However, I regret for not discussing it adequately with the Gerakan leadership before taking the stand," said Kong, who won the Kudat seat in the 1994 state election.

Kong has come under fire from other Barisan Nasional (BN) components for not adhering to the coalition's line.

The controversy took a twist when Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said the party regretted Kong's action but would not take action against him.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad subsequently set the record straight when he said Kong should change his stand or leave the party.

Kong, who last Wednesday offered to resign his Sabah party post to defuse the controversy, has until Saturday to make up his mind before the Gerakan central committee meets to decide on his fate.

If Kong wants to remain in the BN, he should be prepared to face disciplinary action.

However, Kong seems satisfied with his explanation to Gerakan leaders that he had acted with his constituents' sentiment in mind.

"I have already explained and leave it to the Gerakan leaders to decide now," he said.

For the record, nominated state assemblyman Jahid Jahim was sacked by Akar Bersatu for opposing the forestry bill. -- BERNAMA

JS JM YBY