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Nanyang deal fallout `avoidable`

Chow Kum Hor; Raynore Mering

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - MCA deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek today said although it was normal for political parties to face problems, the current controversy over the Nanyang Press Holdings Bhd acquisition was avoidable.

Responding to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement yesterday that every party, including Umno faced problems, Lim said he concurred with that view.

"But had MCA listened to the views on the grounds, the problem could have been avoided. There were already warning signs but they were ignored," Lim told the New Straits Times.

Even before MCA investment arm Huaren Holdings Sdn Bhd signed the deal to acquire a 72.35 per cent stake in Nanyang Press, sentiments from the Chinese community towards the deal were already unfavourable.

Lim likened the acquisition to overtaking a vehicle while there was an on-coming vehicle.

Such a collision, Lim said, could have been avoided if the driver was careful and did not overtake.

The former Human Resources Minister also expressed regret that the party's central committee meeting was held only on May 30 to discuss the deal when the agreement had been signed two days earlier.

"Please don't treat the central committee like a circus. The eight of us are also not clowns," said Lim, referring to the eight central committee members who voted against the deal.

Besides Lim, the others were vice-president Datuk Chua Jui Meng and Datuk Chan Kong Choy, Youth head Datuk Ong Tee Keat, Wanita deputy head Datin Paduka Dr Tan Yee Kew, Selangor executive councillor Datuk Tang See Hang, Mentakab MP Datuk Fu Ah Kiow and lawyer Datuk Wong Mook Leong.

Dr Mahathir also correctly pointed out yesterday that the problems faced by MCA now could affect Chinese support for Barisan Nasional.

The Chinese community and many of the Chinese-based non-governmental organisations, Lim said, were MCA's "friends" and any action that would antagonise these groups could translate into reduced votes for BN.

In Kota Kinabalu, MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said he viewed very seriously Dr Mahathir's call for reconciliation in the party.

Asked on steps that would be taken towards reconciliation, he said: "We take the Prime Minister's views very seriously. I will report to him."

Dr Ling also said the party's leadership would consider holding an emergency general meeting, as suggested by party secretary-general Datuk Seri Dr Ting Chew Peh, to help settle the dispute as allowed under the party's constitution.

"Let's go through the processes available, the EGM is one of the options."

Dr Ling also said Huaren Holdings's board of trustees meeting, scheduled for Wednesday to discuss the takeover of Nanyang Press, had been postponed.

The decision to postpone the meeting was made as Chua, who is one of the trustees, could not attend.

"He (Chua) said he is busy. So we will have to find a time when he is not busy," said Dr Ling, who is also Transport Minister.

He said this at a Press conference here after opening the Road Transport Department's new headquarters. The other trustees are Dr Ling, Lim and Ting.

