

MCA pair suspended

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Party thumbs nose at BN partners who want Penang assemblymen sacked for indiscipline

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KUALA LUMPUR: A defiant MCA thumbed its nose yesterday at calls from other Barisan Nasional component parties that it sack two Penang assemblymen for indiscipline.

Instead, it adopted a face-saving measure and suspended indefinitely the membership of Lim Boo Chang (Datuk Keramat) and Tan Cheng Liang (Jawi).

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, in announcing the decision of the MCA presidential council, said the move to suspend the duo's membership takes effect immediately.

The 21-member council made the decision after an hour-long meeting at the party headquar-

ters in Jalan Ampang.

Ling said the suspension was the most appropriate measure taken, and that the decision would be conveyed to the BN headquarters immediately.

In Penang, Lim and Tan expressed shock and sadness at their suspension, but vowed to continue serving their constituents (*see Page 3*).

Their suspension comes three weeks after they abstained from voting against a DAP motion in the Penang state assembly on Nov 21 to postpone the controversial RM1.2 billion Penang Outer Ring Road project.

Their defiance of the BN whip prompted calls from various BN leaders, including chairman and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, for action against Lim and Tan. The lead-

ers felt the pair's action would undermine the ruling coalition. Umno and Gerakan recommended that the pair be expelled.

"I think this penalty which has been proposed is serious and it is appropriate. It is a serious disciplinary action," Ling said.

He said the presidential council upheld the decision made by the five-man MCA disciplinary committee which met last Friday.

Sixteen presidential council members voted in favour of suspending the duo, whereas Datuk Fu Ah Kiow abstained. Another four - deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek, vice-presidents Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, Datuk Chua Jui Meng and Datuk Chan Kong Choy - were absent.

Ling said the disciplinary

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committee had unanimously recommended to suspend the pair.

Ling, who is the transport minister, said based on the party constitution, the duo have 14 days to appeal to the central committee.

He said Lim and Tan will continue to serve their respective constituents despite the suspension, as they were elected by the people.

He declined to say when the suspension would be lifted.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said MCA should explain the suspension sentence, Bernama reports.

"I certainly want to know what it means by 'indefinite-

ly' ... if 'indefinitely' is to mean until the end of their respective terms as BN elected representatives, then it could be viewed as a stern decision," he said after attending a Hari Raya get-together at the Petra Jaya Unity Stadium in Kuching last night.

However, he said if the suspension was for a short period then it would be meaningless and would not commensurate with the gravity of the offence committed.

Gerakan secretary-general Datuk Chia Kwang Chye said the decision to suspend the duo is a farce. "MCA should have done the rightful thing by expelling them from the party," he said, adding that the duo should do the honourable thing and resign.