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`Serious disciplinary breach' (HL)

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PETALING JAYA, Tues. - The two Penang Barisan Nasional assemblymen who abstained from voting on a motion tabled by the Opposition have committed a serious breach of party discipline and can face disciplinary action, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"It is a very serious thing," said the Prime Minister and BN chairman on the action of Lim Boo Chang (Datuk Keramat) and Tan Cheng Liang (Jawi), who chose not to oppose the DAP's motion to postpone construction on the proposed RM1.02 billion Penang Outer Ring Road.

"We will look into precedents and make a decision," he added.

Asked whether disciplinary action would be taken against the duo, he replied: "Possible."

Speaking at a Press conference at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base in Subang upon his return from Paris where he attended the Pledging Conference for the Reconstruction of Lebanon, Dr Mahathir said assemblymen should adhere to party decisions as they contested and won due to support from their parties.

Asked to comment on Tan's explanation that she abstained because it was the voice of her constituents, the Prime Minister retorted: "So it means the BN is not the voice of the people."

On whether elected representatives should be given the choice to vote on the basis of their conscience and not along party lines, Dr Mahathir said: "If everybody votes on conscience, there would not be any party."

"When they want to enter or contest, they ask for support from the party. After they have won they want to act independently, but did they think they could win without the support from the party?"

"How many independents have won in Malaysia? It is the party that wins, which means we are dependent on it. So we must accept party discipline."

Meanwhile, a Penang Gerakan Assemblyman today revealed that the two MCA assemblymen had agreed at the precouncil meeting that the State BN should reject the motion by the DAP.

Sungai Pinang assemblyman Looi Swee Cheang in a statement issued here said it was surprising for Lim and Tan to abstain from voting against the motion when they had not raised any reservations earlier.

"When State BN chairman Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon proposed that the DAP's motion be rejected, the two MCA assemblymen kept mum in agreement."

"If they had any proposals or reservations, they should have spoken out then. However, they abstained during voting time which smacks of insincerity on their part," said Looi.

He said it was also illogical of Tan to claim that her action was for the voters' confidence.

"If she were truly sincere as she claims, then she should have spoken out at the proper time and place."

In Penang, State MCA chairman Wong Kam Hoong came to the duo's defence, dismissing notions that they were conspiring to discredit the State Barisan Nasional leadership.

He said Lim and Tan were not directed by anyone to humiliate the Penang BN leadership under Koh.

"They abstained instead of voting against a motion tabled by a DAP assemblyman because (Deputy Chief Minister) Datuk Dr Hilmi Yahaya did not inform them on what to do in the matter," he said.

Wong, who is also Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Parliamentary

Secretary, maintained that Lim and Tan were innocent over the matter.

"They did not plan to do anything bad, or jointly planned to abstain from voting."

Wong said when there was no instruction from Dr Hilmi, who is State BN whip in the House, Lim and Tan chose to abstain.

On Sunday, Dr Hilmi told reporters that Koh had specifically instructed all backbenchers to vote against the motion when they met for a preAssembly briefing in Komtar on Nov 9.

Dr Hilmi said although he attended the briefing, he did not give any instruction to those present, including to Lim and Tan, to reject the motion.

Wong, when asked if the assemblymen had been instructed to reject the DAP motion, refused to comment.