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BN has power to act against MCA duo

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Barisan Nasional has the power to act against the two errant Penang MCA assemblymen if their party fails to deal with them accordingly.

BN secretary-general Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat said there were provisions in the coalition's constitution which provided for disciplinary action against members of component parties.

Although the disciplinary clause had never been used so far, he said he had recently asked the coalition's deputy chairman, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, to head the BN disciplinary board.

Abdullah is also Deputy Prime Minister and BN management committee chairman.

The coalition's constitution provided for the establishment of a disciplinary board but it has never been activated.

"It is high time the board be established," said Mohamed at Abdullah's Hari Raya open house today.

When it came to discipline, he said BN was concerned about the behaviour of its elected representatives and would take action to safeguard the integrity of the party.

On whether it was appropriate for the MCA presidential council to refer assemblymen Tan Cheng Liang (Jawi) and Lim Boo Chang (Datuk Keramat) to the party's disciplinary board, he said: "I agree that the component party should look into the matter first."

Mohamed was commenting on MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik's statement yesterday that he wanted to check if BN could take disciplinary action against members of component parties.

Tan and Lim, at the recent State Legislative Assembly meeting, had abstained in an Opposition motion to postpone the RM1.02 billion Penang Outer Ring Road project.

This led to criticisms from Gerakan and Umno, with the latter asking the duo be sacked.

On Tuesday, the MCA presidential council directed its disciplinary board to hold an inquiry into the alleged breach of discipline and make recommendations to the council for action.

Yesterday, Gerakan secretary-general Chia Kwang Chye dismissed the council's decision as a "political manoeuvre" amounting to a delay tactic.

Dr Ling, responding to Chia's allegation, today said: "I don't want to be rude to anybody, so I reserve my comments."

Asked if MCA should be allowed to deal with this issue without interference from other parties, Dr Ling said it had been the practice for the party to handle disciplinary matters according to its constitution.

Meanwhile, Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib said Umno had made its stand clear on the matter, and the MCA should take it seriously to ensure close co-operation in the BN.

"MCA must respect the views of a component party and we have made our stand clear. We hope they will deal with the matter soon," he said.

The Umno supreme council had last week recommended the expulsion of the two Penang backbenchers.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said the decision would, however, be made by the BN supreme council which would meet in January.

"We leave it to BN to make a final decision on the matter. As for Umno's

stand, we feel the duo must be expelled," he said after chairing the council meeting at the party headquarters last Friday.

Asked if the relationship among the parties would be strained if the MCA ignored the stand taken by component parties, Muhammad said it was best not to speculate.

"We will think about it when the time comes," he said.

Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who is also an Umno vice-president, said the MCA should be guided by Dr Mahathir's viewpoint and make a decision as soon as possible.

"It should not be seen as if the MCA central committee is avoiding the matter and passing the responsibility to the disciplinary committee.

"The MCA must take this matter seriously and not set a precedent which could be detrimental to the party," he said.