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Chinese newspapers go to town on two MCA State Assemblymen

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MALAYSIANS have been primed for the outcome of the MCA-Gerakan political drama being played out in Penang with the announcement that the two MCA State Assemblymen will know their fate tomorrow.

A decision by the MCA presidential council will hopefully bring the episode involving Lim Boo Chang (BN-Datuk Keramat) and Tan Cheng Liang (BN-Jawi) to an end.

Much has been said by various quarters on the issue of their abstention from a vote against a DAP motion on the Penang Outer Ring Road (PORR) at last month's sitting of the State Assembly.

While the Berita Harian and Utusan Malaysia have consistently taken a stand that the MCA Assemblyman had to heed the whip on any motion and were thus guilty of undermining the Barisan Nasional, it was interesting to note the manner in which the Chinese media tackled the issue.

All the Chinese newspapers went to town on the statement by Lim Chien Aun (BN-Bayan Lepas) that Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon did not issue a specific directive to the 30 BN Assemblymen in the House to vote against the DAP motion.

This elicited a swift response from Koh who rebutted Lim's contention by saying that the matter had been discussed and that he had agreed to two Assemblymen speaking against the motion in the State Assembly.

His deputy, Datuk Dr Hilmi Yahaya, also denied Lim's claims, saying the Chief Minister had specifically urged BN Assemblymen to vote against the motion.

In what was seen as a side plot, the MCA disciplinary board on Tuesday decided to seek an explanation from Koh on why eight other BN Assemblymen did not vote against the DAP motion.

The Sin Chew Daily and Nanyang Siang Pau on Friday quoted board chairman Kam Woon Wah as saying that the decision to seek information was to enlighten the panel further on the issue. He denied the move was aimed at casting aspersions on others or shifting the blame, as it were, from the assemblymen.

Kicking the ball back into the Gerakan court, he said Koh was in the best position to elaborate on the issue, given the fact that he was the State BN chairman.

Nanyang Siang Pau and Sin Chew Daily on Thursday quoted Gerakan secretary-general Chia Kwang Chye as saying that MCA's letter to Koh was a red herring aimed at delaying the process of disciplinary action against Lim and Tan.

As the Chinese Press debated the merits and demerits of the letter to Koh and the direction the issue should take, the Berita Harian and Utusan Malaysia highlighted another facet of the issue.

They quoted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Wednesday as saying that while the BN should not intervene in issues involving component parties, the coalition had the final say on its membership.

The two newspapers read this to mean that while the disciplinary board could make a decision for or against its Assemblymen, the MCA had to be mindful of the fact that its very membership in the BN depended on the goodwill of other component members.

The Berita Harian quoted Dr Mahathir, also the BN chairman, as saying that the MCA would be seen as not supporting the BN system of consensus if it did not heed the coalition's stand on the Assemblymen's actions.

Another issue which caught the eye of Malaysians last week was the Sultan of Selangor's decision to limit the number of Datuks to 40.

The Ruler told the New Straits Times he would be restricting Datukships and that the selection process would be stringent.

For the record, the Sultan trimmed the list of Datuks to 39 this year when he announced the honours list on Tuesday in conjunction with his 57th birthday the next day.

The Berita Harian, in a follow-up, quoted Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob as saying that the State Government had no plans to trim the number of people awarded the Darjah Kebesaran Indera Mahkota Pahang (DIMP) in conjunction with the Sultan of Pahang's birthday.

However, the Sri Indera Mahkota Pahang (SIMP) and Darjah Kebesaran Sultan Ahmad Shah Pahang (DSAP) would be restricted to 11 and 17 respectively.

He had said Pahang could not restrict the number of datukships as it was a large State and that the awarding of honours was the prerogative of the Ruler.

Utusan Malaysia columnist Awang Sulung last week supported Cuepacs' plan to ask the Government for a five-day week.

In his daily Bisik Bisik column, he said that the five-day week system had been successfully implemented by the private sector in Malaysia and Europe.

He concurred with Cuepacs that the system could help develop the family institution and promote domestic tourism.