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Power lies with BN, says Dr M (HL)

Deborah Loh; Patrick Sennyah; Chow Kum Hor

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today reminded the MCA that the Barisan Nasional has the power to decide which parties can be in the coalition.

He said while it was true that the BN could not act against individual members of component parties, it could act against the parties themselves.

Dr Mahathir agreed with MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, who yesterday said that the BN should not get involved in the party's decision on disciplinary action against its Penang State Assembly members Lim Boo Chang (BN-Datuk Keramat) and Tan Cheng Liang (BN-Jawi).

"Yes, that is true," said Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman.

"But the BN still has the power to decide which party becomes a member of the coalition."

He said all BN parties worked on the basis of consensus.

"If a party is not able to abide by the BN's stand, that means the party is not fully in support of the BN's system of consensus," he told reporters at his office after launching the book *In the Time of the Mishmish: A Painting in Twenty Parts* by Dr Alijah Gordon.

Dr Ling yesterday said disciplinary matters pertaining to individual members of a party should only be dealt with by the party concerned and not by the BN.

He said this was provided for under the BN constitution.

"In BN, one deals with the parties and not individuals," Dr Ling was quoted as saying. "This is because membership in the coalition is according to party, not individuals."

The debate was sparked by Tan and Lim having abstained from voting on an Opposition motion to defer the RM1.01 billion Penang Outer Ring Road project at a recent State Legislative Assembly meeting.

BN secretary-general Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat also criticised the MCA, saying that while the coalition may not have the power to discipline errant members from component parties, it could act against the parties themselves.

"Is Dr Ling suggesting that the BN act against the MCA since he pointed out that the coalition cannot discipline its errant assemblymen," Mohamed said in a telephone interview.

Article 14 of the BN constitution provides that: "The Dewan Tertinggi (supreme council) shall have the power to discipline or expel any member party for acting in any manner prejudicial to the interest of the BN."

Mohamed said if Dr Ling had forgotten, all candidates of component parties had contested under the BN banner, embraced the BN manifesto and won through the support of all BN supporters.

"Is Dr Ling, in wanting to protect his party assemblymen, challenging the BN to act against the party itself?"

Mohamed said Dr Ling must also remember that BN has its hierarchy, organisational structure, administrative and disciplinary committee.

He said the issue of the two Penang State Assembly members was a BN matter as much as the MCA's, as their actions had affected the coalition's rule in Penang.

"To my mind, MCA should realise that the BN is not hard-up for candidates to contest in elections, and that includes the MCA assemblymen," he said.

Today, Dr Ling said that the MCA had done the right thing by referring

the two to the disciplinary board.

He said, however, that "being in an interdependent organisation like BN, MCA will have to listen to and co-operate with the other component parties".

Dr Ling also reiterated that in the BN constitution, the coalition could not act against individual members, but only against member parties.

Gerakan secretary-general Chia Kwang Chye said although he felt disciplinary matters should be handled by the respective component parties, the component parties should not risk the integrity of the BN.

"BN elected representatives contest under the coalition banner, and not under the party. MCA should know what to do," he said.

Umno Youth deputy chief Datuk Abdul Aziz Sheikh Fadzir said BN had given the MCA ample time to act on the two and the statement by Dr Ling was an insult to BN component parties.

Aziz said BN representatives must echo the voice of the coalition and not personal views.