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MCA suspends Lim, Tan (HL)

Patrick Sennyah; Chow Kum Hor

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The MCA presidential council today suspended indefinitely the party membership of its two errant Penang State Assembly members, Lim Boo Chang (Datuk Keramat) and Tan Cheng Liang (Jawi), with immediate effect.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said this was the recommendation of the party's disciplinary board which met on Friday and unanimously agreed to the suspension.

On the position of Lim and Tan as assembly members, Dr Ling said they were elected by the people and would continue as they had a responsibility to serve their constituents.

Dr Ling, in explaining what transpired during the meeting and how the council came to the decision, said: "Based on the collective wisdom of the council, we accept and respect the recommendation of the disciplinary committee.

"However, according to the party constitution, if Lim and Tan are unhappy with the decision, they can appeal to the party's central committee within 14 days."

Dr Ling said he had also met Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also Barisan Nasional chairman, over this issue on two occasions, but declined to elaborate on what Dr Mahathir had said.

"We will convey the decision to Dr Mahathir immediately. Our secretary-general Datuk Seri Dr Ting Chew Peh will call the BN headquarters and follow up with an official letter."

Lim and Tan came under fire from fellow BN component parties after they abstained from voting against an Opposition motion to defer the RM1.02 billion Penang Outer Ring Road (PORR) project.

Asked if he thought the penalty was sufficient considering other BN component parties, including Umno and Gerakan, had pushed for the two to be expelled, Dr Ling said: "The penalty is serious and appropriate. If they want to appeal, that is their right and I don't want to speculate what the central committee may decide."

Of the 21 presidential council members, 16, some through proxies, voted in favour of the disciplinary committee's recommendations, while four members were absent and one abstained.

Those absent were party deputy president Datuk Seri Lim Ah Lek, vice-presidents Datuk Chua Jui Meng and Datuk Chan Kong Choy and Youth chief Datuk Ong Tee Keat, while Datuk Fu Ah Kiow abstained.

All five are aligned to the Team B faction of the party led by Ah Lek.

Explaining the effect of the suspension and the role of the two as assembly members, the MCA president said: "They will be outside the party. They will not be able to use party resources as they are now suspended from the MCA," he said, adding that Lim and Tan would receive soon an official letter from the party on their suspension.

He also refused to reveal details of the disciplinary committee's findings.

On whether the decision would be acceptable to other MCA members, he said it was not right to speculate on what others think.

"The disciplinary committee consists of party veterans who are all very experienced and made their recommendations after careful deliberations. The presidential council, on its part has decided to accept their recommendations."

The disciplinary committee is chaired by Datuk Kam Woon Wah and consists of four other members - Datuk Dr Wee Khoo Hock, Datuk Wong Seng Chow, Datuk Chan Kit Chee and Wang Choon Wing.

On allegations by Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik on Saturday that Penang MCA chairman Wong Kam Hoong was the "instigator" of the actions of Lim and Tan, Dr Ling said Wong had replied to the allegations and he (Dr Ling) had nothing to add.

"The PORR is not a Federal Government project and we don't have a clue what it involves. As far as we're concerned, we don't want to make a stand on something we know nothing about," he said when asked what MCA's official stand on PORR was.

Meanwhile, Ting said the two were still MCA members, but had lost their rights in the party, including using party resources.

"They are still friends of the BN," he said, adding that he believed that this could be the first time MCA suspended an elected representative.