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Ling: Dr Mahathir's reminder not a direct warning to MCA

KOTA TINGGI, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik today said he did not regard the reminder from the Prime Minister that Barisan Nasional has the power to decide which parties could be in the coalition as a direct warning to the MCA.

The MCA president said his party had regularly sought advice from Dr Mahathir in the latter's capacity as both Prime Minister and BN chairman on various issues, including how to handle the issue involving the two MCA Assemblyman from Penang.

Reacting to Dr Mahathir's statement in newspapers today that the BN had the power to accept or expel parties from the coalition, Dr Ling said he agreed with it but did not regard it as a warning directed at the MCA.

Dr Mahathir made the statement after an earlier remark by Dr Ling that the BN should not get involved in MCA's disciplinary action against its assemblymen Lim Boo Chang (BN-Datuk Keramat) and Tan Cheng Liang (BN-Jawi).

On the fate of the two, Dr Ling said the MCA would not rush into a decision as it was still acting within the party constitution.

In dismissing talks that tomorrow would be the D-day for Lim and Tan as mere speculation, Dr Ling said he himself did not know when the MCA disciplinary board, which is handling the issue, would make its decision.

"If they (the board) need a week, don't ask them to do it in an hour. It is not proper for us to interfere with disciplinary matters," he said.

Dr Ling also maintained that disciplinary action should be taken by the MCA and not BN, as acknowledged by Dr Mahathir yesterday.

"Dr Mahathir is absolutely right. It's the truth. I don't think that it is a warning. We are adhering to the party constitution; that is also the truth," he said at a Press conference during a working visit here.

Lim and Tan had triggered a controversy when they abstained on an Opposition motion to defer the RM1.01 billion Penang Outer Ring Road project at the State's Legislative Assembly meeting last month.

Following the Nov 21 incident, the MCA came under criticism from other BN leaders for delaying its decision against the duo.

Dr Ling has also been accused of trying to protect them.

On criticisms levelled against him, Dr Ling said BN component parties were inter-dependent and, therefore, had to listen to each other's views apart from working together.

"We are an inter-dependent coalition where we co-operate and work with each other as well as talk and listen to each other," he said.

When asked about the possibility of BN taking action against MCA for not promptly taking action against the errant members, Dr Ling evaded the question.

In Alor Star, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah again reminded the MCA on the need to act in tandem with other BN component parties in accordance with the spirit of consensus practised by BN.

He said all component parties must realise that their elected representatives were selected through the consensual agreement of the BN and that they campaigned as BN candidates.

"This shows that they are members of the BN Government and, as such, supporting the BN is a duty and responsibility which cannot be taken lightly," he said after attending a Hari Raya gathering organised by the State Government at Wisma Darulaman today.

Abdullah, who is deputy BN chairman, said he agreed with Dr Mahathir's views on the need to adhere to the system of consensus practised in the BN and make it a success by taking action which supported the consensus and not to jeopardise it.

He was also asked about Dr Ling's statement reported today in which he said that the party's disciplinary committee had the right to seek an explanation from Penang Chief Minister Datuk Seri Dr Koh Tsu Koon on the absence of eight other BN State Assemblymen from the voting.

"There is no problem if the party needs information," Abdullah replied.

MCA vice-president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting said as a senior component partner in the BN, the MCA would definitely consider recommendations for strict action against the duo.

Asked to comment on Umno's call to sack Tan and Lim, Ong said: "We respect Umno's views.

"But for now, let's just wait for the disciplinary board to complete the investigation, and only then can the party decide what to do."

Meanwhile, Bernama quoted Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin as saying that BN's image might be affected if the MCA did not take stern action in handling the issue.

He said the MCA, as an important component party, must act immediately against them.

"We want action to be taken on the matter as soon as possible so that other people would not say that it (the MCA) is looking for other excuses," he said today.

Muhyiddin, who is also Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister, said the MCA should respect the views of Dr Mahathir as the BN chairman because the issue was related to matters pertaining to BN principles.

"That's why we don't want the MCA leaders to perceive the matter as an internal problem and it would take time to resolve the issue in its own way.

"But the party as an affiliated member of the BN cannot act differently or follow its own style," Muhyiddin said.