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BN endorses MCA decision

By Patrick Sennyah; Chow Kum Hor

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Barisan Nasional supreme council today endorsed the decision by the MCA to suspend its two errant Penang State Assemblymen, Tan Cheng Liang (Jawi) and Lim Boo Chang (Datuk Keramat).

Prime Minister and BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, however, said since the MCA had imposed an "indefinite suspension" on the two, the BN supreme council would decide on the duration of the suspension.

"During discussions, there were various opinions, with some members (of the supreme council) saying the procedure at the Penang State Assembly was not followed properly, while others said the procedure was not clear.

"MCA said it had decided to act against the two Assemblymen since there were no regulations in the BN constitution which stated that a component party could not act against its members and that it should refer the matter to the BN," he said after chairing the three-hour BN supreme council meeting.

Dr Mahathir said an "indefinite suspension" could mean anything. "There is no time limit here. During their suspension, the two remain as MCA members and only cease to do so if they are sacked from the party."

On Nov 21 last year, Lim and Tan had abstained in an Opposition motion to postpone the RM1.01 billion Penang Outer Ring Road project at the Penang Legislative Assembly.

This led to criticisms from BN component parties as the two had allegedly breached the coalition's code of conduct.

The Umno supreme council had asked for the sacking of both Assemblymen, but later decided to let the BN leadership decide on the matter.

On Dec 16, the MCA presidential council decided to "suspend indefinitely" Lim and Tan - a sentence deemed vague by several top BN leaders, including BN secretary-general Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat.

Dr Mahathir also said the BN supreme council today decided that there was no need to impose any further penalty on Lim and Tan.

Dr Mahathir said some council members felt there was a need for a regulation in the BN constitution outlining the responsibilities of a BN elected representative and the council agreed that all BN representatives must support the party's motion in the House at any time and always have the same stand.

He said since Lim and Tan were still MCA members, they could not voice any objection or act in a way which opposed the BN, in or out of the House.

He said details of this new regulation, which would empower the BN supreme council to act against indisciplined members from component parties, would be drafted and discussed at the next meeting.

Asked when the supreme council would decide on the duration of the two's suspension, Dr Mahathir said: "We will decide when we are ready."

On the criteria to determine the suspension period, he said it would depend on the conduct of the two.

Asked if the supreme council had discussed the eight other Penang BN State Assemblymen who were not in the House when the motion was tabled, the Prime Minister said the supreme council did discuss the matter and was told that the Assemblymen had valid reasons for not being there.

"We were also told that their presence was not critical as the BN had enough majority in the House to oppose the Opposition's motion," he said.

The eight unaccounted BN votes were MCA's Lau Cheik Tuan (Berapit), Datuk Dr Sak Cheng Lum (Bagan Jermal), Lim Chien Aun (Bayan Lepas), Lee Hak Teik (Pengkalan Kota) and Lim Gim Soon (Kampung Kolam); Gerakan's Datuk Dr Toh Kin Woon (Machang Bubuk); and Umno's Hilmi Abdul Rashid (Bertam) and Syed Amerruddin Datuk Syed Ahmad (Teluk Kumbar).

Dr Mahathir said the supreme council also agreed to accept the Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP) as a BN component party.

"They will attend the next BN supreme council meeting. All component parties have agreed to cooperate and work closely with SPDP," he said.

The SPDP, formed by a group of former Sarawak National Party (SNAP) members led by Sarawak Public Health and Environment Minister Datuk William Mawan Ikom, was accepted as a component member of the Sarawak BN on Nov 19.

Mawan later said he was happy with the BN supreme council's decision and that there was no objection from component party leaders.

"We are looking forward to work with the BN."

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