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Ong: PM agreed to lifting suspension, reinstating assemblymen

Chow Kum Hor

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad agreed to the MCA lifting the suspension on its two Penang assemblymen, party president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting said today.

Ong said Dr Mahathir had agreed to reinstating Tan Cheng Liang (Jawi) and Lim Boo Chang (Datuk Keramat) during a discussion he (Ong) had with the Prime Minister on the status of the duo.

"The discussions were held a few days before the reinstatement (on Thursday). After the presidential council lifted the suspension, I again informed the Prime Minister," Ong, who is Housing and Local Government Minister, said.

He said this after launching a book Shui Qing Shi Zi Jian (The Rocks Are Visible In Clear Water) by MCA Youth secretary-general Lok Seng Kok. It is a compilation of his articles on issues published in Chinese dailies between 1999 and 2001.

Loh was also political secretary to former president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik.

Ong said he had written to Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman, deputy chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and secretary-general Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat informing them about the MCA's decision.

Copies of the letter were also sent to Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon and Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik (he had personally informed the latter).

Asked if he foresaw problems from BN component parties following the reinstatement, Ong said he was confident the BN spirit would prevail.

"Now is the time to put behind us any misunderstanding and unhappiness and concentrate on building a better working relationship."

The MCA presidential council re-instated Tan and Lim on Thursday after a seven-month suspension - a decision the council said would help the duo perform their duties better as elected representatives.

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 criticism from BN component parties, especially Gerakan, which leads the Penang Government, as the two had allegedly breached the coalition's code of conduct.

The MCA presidential council "suspended indefinitely" Lim and Tan on Dec 16 after an internal disciplinary inquiry.

On Jan 7, the BN supreme council endorsed the MCA's decision, but the duration of the suspension was to be decided by the BN council.

Keng Yaik had yesterday said he would make recommendations to the council to decide on the status of the duo.