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Suspension on Lim, Tan lifted

Chow Kum Hor

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The MCA presidential council today reinstated the membership of its elected representatives, Lim Boo Chang (Datuk Keramat) and Tan Cheng Liang (Jawi), after a seven-month suspension for abstaining in an opposition motion in the Penang Legislative Assembly.

MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting said since the party's presidential council suspended them on Dec 16, 2002, many people had appealed for their reinstatement.

"The council felt that after six months of suspension, the two elected representatives should now be reinstated. This would be in the best interests of the Barisan Nasional," Ong told a Press conference after chairing a two-hour council meeting - the first since he took over as president.

Ong, the Housing and Local Government Minister, said the BN supreme council would be informed about MCA's decision.

When pointed out that the BN supreme council had on Jan 7 decided that the BN council would be the one deciding the duration of the suspension, Ong said: "Don't worry, it's okay."

Asked if this meant he was confident the BN supreme council would accept MCA's decision to lift the suspension, Ong said he did not want to speculate.

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 dominated the Penang Government, as the two had allegedly breached the coalition's code of conduct.

The Umno supreme council had asked for the sacking of the two assemblymen, but later decided to let the BN leadership decide on the matter. The MCA presidential council "suspended indefinitely" Lim and Tan after an internal disciplinary inquiry.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced that the BN supreme council had endorsed MCA's decision but it was up to the BN supreme council to decide how long the suspension would last.

Meanwhile, Gerakan secretary-general Chia Kwang Chye said imposing or lifting the suspension was the prerogative of MCA and an internal affair. "But the BN supreme council has yet to decide on the status of the two."