

Penang CM : I can be charged and jailed again
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Being a chief minister does not mean one is above the law and would not be jailed for any offence. MCPX

More so if you are a chief minister from a party outside the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition.

lim kit siang dap pc 130208 guan eng Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng felt that he is vulnerable to such political vendetta if the BN federal government is really gunning for him.

"I have been imprisoned before for sedition, so I know I can be charged, found guilty and jailed again. Since the police are under the federal authorities, I can be detained under the Sedition Act or the Internal Security Act anytime.

"But I would be shocked if I were to be detained merely for advocating an open tender policy," he told reporters when asked to comment on the Special Branch quizzing journalists regarding a statement issued by Lim after the opposition seized control of Penang.

The journalists were from Chinese dailies Nanyang Siang Pau and China Press.

It is learnt that the Special Branch carried out an investigation following a police report lodged by Umno on Lim's first press statement as the incoming chief minister where he announced that the new state government would not practice the New Economic Policy.

"We will adopt an open-tender policy on all government contracts," he had said.

Why the fuss?

Lim said he could not understand the reasons behind all the fuss about his open-tender policy when after all, the policy complies with the guidelines laid down by the Finance Ministry.

He is bemused that the state government policy to adopt an open-tender system in awarding government contracts and procurement had been subject to constant criticism from Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi and Umno.

Since the open tender policy was in compliance with Finance Ministry's guidelines on tender awards, he said recent criticisms by Abdullah and Umno were off the mark.

Abdullah and Umno leaders have recently cautioned about unfairness and imbalance distribution of tenders through the open-tender system.

They claimed that the open-tender policy would be disadvantageous to financially weak companies.

Penang Umno leaders even organised a rally near Komtar to protest against this move by the new state government.

Lim said that the state government would adopt a fair and just policy to distribute government contracts equally and fairly to all.

"I don't understand what all the fuss is about. We are complying with the guidelines provided by the finance ministry on tender awards.

"So why we are being criticised for adhering to the guidelines. What's the issue here? Is it that the federal government does not want us to comply with the guidelines? Perhaps we may not have been criticised if we had not observed them?" he told reporters.

Under the federal tender-award regulations, only Class F contractors, a sector exclusively monopolised by Malays, can secure government contracts worth below RM200,000.

The contracts shall be distributed equally to all by rotating the tender awards fairly to all Class F companies. The companies will be picked by drawing out names.

Companies that were picked out and awarded a contract would be excluded from subsequent draws.

Fair distribution

In this way, the Penang government feels that contracts can be distributed fairly to all Malay contractors.

Contracts above RM200, 000 can be secured through price quotation. The government reserves the right to award the tenders based on the company's track record and financial strength.

Lim explained this new state policy to Malay contractors during a dialogue session recently.

"They welcomed it," he declared, while calling on the federal government to amend the guidelines if it felt that the ministry's open tender rules were unfair and unjust.

"The prime minister should make the necessary amendments to the guidelines, instead of wrongly criticising us for complying with the law," he said.

By giving open tenders, he said, the state government would feed the people of Penang with information on how their money had been spent.

"They have the right to know," he said.