

REINING IN THE 'MAVERICK'

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SHAH ALAM: 9am, Nov 8.

That's the deadline set for embattled Port Klang assemblyman Datuk Zakaria Mat Deros to resign as Klang municipal councillor.

If he does not quit by then, the state executive council will sack him.

This was revealed to the *New Straits Times* by Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo yesterday.

"If by the start of the state exco meeting on that day his letter is not with us, he had better be prepared to be removed," he said of the assemblyman who has put the Menteri Besar in a spot.

He said Zakaria's appointment as a councillor was endorsed by the state exco and therefore his resignation should also be through the exco.

"I cannot make my own decision to remove him if he does not relinquish his post. I need the consensus of the exco," he said.

The Port Klang state assembly-

man hogged the headlines after it emerged that he was building a palatial home in Pandamaran without approval from the Klang Municipal Council.

Newspapers also reported that he, his son and daughter-in-law were going to be appointed to the council by virtue of their political positions.

Dr Khir looked calm and occasionally laughed while fielding questions on the assemblyman and the Klang Municipal Council at his office.

Questions have been raised over the way Zakaria and two other councillors have blatantly built massive houses without planning approval.

Dr Khir's leadership has also come under the spotlight, with several newspaper columnists questioning the way he has reacted to the situation.

"Selangor is a big state. I can't be expected to know everything or be everywhere," he said, brushing aside talk that the Klang Municipal Council and the MB had little control over councillors.

Dr Khir conceded the Zakaria

episode had damaged the Barisan Nasional's image but said he had instituted measures to dispel the negative perceptions it had created in the public mind.

"There has been damage done by him. That is why we want to avoid such incidents," he said, pointing out that he had given two months to all councillors to clear their debts, quit rent arrears and assessment arrears or be dropped.

He dismissed talk that he only acted against Zakaria as and when the media raised questions about the controversy.

"I tried to give him a chance to resign on his own. I told him well before he went to meet Tuanku (the Selangor Sultan) to resign," he said, replying to observations by columnists that it took the Sultan of Selangor to try and right a wrong.

At the height of the controversy, when Zakaria was summoned by the Sultan, who wanted to get a clear picture on the allegations against Zakaria, including those about his behaviour, he did not show up, citing illness.

However, he turned up on Oct 28 at Istana Kayangan and the Sultan, in an hour-long closed door meeting, advised Zakaria to mend his ways and relinquish his position as a councillor.

Dr Khir said: "We do not want to embarrass him. I advised him a week before Tuanku summoned him to the palace to resign as a councillor.

"I thought it would be better for him to declare it in front of Tuanku. But when I got a report that Zakaria did not say so, I decided to give him an ultimatum."

He said Zakaria should have apologised and, as a responsible leader, should have relinquished the post.

Dr Khir also replied to talk that the Selangor government could have avoided the current situation if it had dealt with Zakaria's candidacy honestly.

"I checked, there was no record against Zakaria. No ACA report, no police case against him," he said of the assemblyman who had slapped Teng Chang Kim during a state assembly sitting in 2000.

Dr Khir said party considera-

tions too had to be taken into account in selecting candidates for elections. Zakaria is the division chief.

Outlining the procedure for selection of an election candidate, Dr Khir said when a person was nominated, he would be vetted by the ACA and police and as far as Zakaria was concerned, both agencies had given him a clean bill.

"When there is no case against him, I can't say anything. There was no criminal case. Even my name was given for vetting to the ACA and the police," he added.

Zakaria was going to serve his 12th term as councillor and many wondered how he could serve for so many years. One term is two years.

To this Dr Khir said: "There should be guidelines on this. I think two to three terms are enough. I need to discuss this with the party."

He said he was open to a lot of things but sometimes tradition made change difficult.

"But slowly we will do it. I know most Malaysians like all changes in one go."