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Three Ministers to quit (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Three long-serving Cabinet Ministers have expressed their desire to retire and not contest in the general election.

Whether or not they get their wish will depend on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The three are Datuk Lim Ah Lek (Human Resources Minister and MCA deputy president), Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud (Agriculture Minister and Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu vice-president) and Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha (Defence Minister and former PBB deputy president).

Lim was appointed to the Cabinet in 1989, Sulaiman in 1981 and Abang Abu Bakar in 1990. PBB vice-president Datuk Effendi Norwawi is expected to contest the Kuala Rajang parliamentary seat which is held by Abang Abu Bakar. Effendi is Dalat state assemblyman and owner of the private television station NTV7. Dr Sulaiman is Petra Jaya MP.

At a Press conference at the Transport Ministry this evening, MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the party has accepted Lim's decision to retire.

Dr Ling said Lim will, however, continue to serve as deputy president of the party.

Speaking to reporters after handing over cash and other benefits to 120 families and their children at the Socso headquarters here earlier, Lim indicated that if he had his way, today's Press conference would have been his last.

Lim had made it known on a number of occasions his desire to retire to spend more quality time with his family after 25 years in active politics.

When asked to confirm reports today that he would not be defending his Bentong parliamentary seat, Lim said: "All I can tell you is that I have submitted the list of Pahang MCA candidates to party president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik but I have excluded my name."

Lim said he had written a letter to Dr Mahathir stating his desire to retire.

He had planned to retire from politics way back in 1986 but was asked to stay on by the party leadership then.

When approached in 1974 to contest for a state seat in Pahang, Lim said he had agreed to stay for only one term as he was running his father's business.

"I agreed to run for one term to help the BN win the seat from Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia ... but I have been here for 25 years now," he said.

When he voiced his intention to retire in 1986, again he was asked to stay another term to help stabilise the party.

"I had obliged for the sake of the party. But I feel I have now overstayed," he said.

Lim said he has also helped groom several people whom he felt were ready to replace him.

"I spent many years grooming them ... since 1974. I am confident they are ready to take over," he said, adding that his decision to retire was not made overnight.

Lim also dismissed allegations that he had problems with Dr Ling. Describing the latter as a "twin brother", Lim said Dr Ling has been instrumental in uniting the party and had carried out many projects such as the expansion of the Tunku Abdul Rahman colleges, the Langkawi Project

and raising funds for the Independent Chinese schools.