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Dr Ling awaits leave approval

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik today sent in his application for two weeks' leave to reflect on his decision to resign as Transport Minister but will continue his duties as MCA president.

He has a full schedule tomorrow opening the State MCA conventions in Kelantan and Terengganu, and a Chinese school in Jertih.

He confirmed today that he would attend these functions tomorrow. He also told reporters at his Ministry that he was awaiting a formal reply on his leave application before going on holiday.

However, Bernama quotes Dr Ling's Press secretary Oong Boon See as saying that the MCA central committee meeting which Dr Ling was to chair on Wednesday has been postponed indefinitely.

He also will not attend several functions in Perak on Sunday, the annual general meeting of the confederation of the Lim associations and its dinner.

Dr Ling, who announced his intention to resign on Monday, was persuaded by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday to take leave to think through his decision.

Dr Ling said he would consider the appeals of MCA leaders who came from all over the country to meet him. Today, he met the MCA division of his constituency, Labis, and the alumni of TAR college.

He asked the people to give him time and peace to mull over their arguments.

"When I come back, I will talk to the PM and tell him my decision," he said.

He said he had been thinking about resigning from the Government a few years ago as he wanted to make way for younger leaders.

Asked if his announcement was a strategy to test his popularity for the next party election, he said the reaction was totally unexpected.

Asked if it was his last term as MCA president, he refused to speculate and said it was up to the delegates at the next party election to decide.

He also dismissed speculation of a rift between him and party deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek.

"Ah Lek and I are good friends. On and off, there will be tension, even husbands and wives quarrel, what more leaders in a party," he said.

Asked if the tension would lead to a divorce, he said it would not. He said if he stepped down, a "natural leader" would somehow "float up".

Asked if he saw any potential candidates, he said: "I see a whole group of people."

He said if they worked together, it did not matter who led the team. It was the duty of all, including grassroot members, to ensure that they worked together and the party was not split.

Dr Ling also said he always advocated a policy of moderation and attributed this to his upbringing in a multi-racial society.

Meanwhile, party vice-president Datuk Ong Ka Ting said today everyone should allow Dr Ling to have peace of mind and not speculate on whether he will stick to his decision to retire from the Government.

"Everyone should consider and respect Dr Ling's feelings in view of the current difficult situation he is facing," he said.

Ong, who is also Housing and Local Government Minister, did not elaborate on the "difficult situation".

"Let us all give him some peace of mind. Do not speculate," he told

reporters afer opening the MetalTech Malaysia 2000 exhibition at the Putra  
World Trade Centre here.

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