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Dr Ling resigns after 14 years as Transport minister

Kamarul Yunus

DATUK Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik has resigned as Transport Minister, a Cabinet post which he has held for 14 years, but Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says he will try to persuade him to reconsider.

The MCA president made the shock announcement at his party's presidential council meeting in the morning, and a statement to this effect was later read by his deputy, Datuk Lim Ah Lek, to reporters at the MCA headquarters.

The party leaders had passed a unanimous resolution to reject the resignation and to appeal to Dr Ling to stay on.

The Prime Minister, who is also Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman, said he would meet Dr Ling "to ask him to reconsider his decision".

"Whether it is welcome or not in the MCA is another matter. Of course the final decision lies with him," Dr Mahathir said after launching MEC Dagang's dealers convention and new corporate logo in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"I haven't accepted (the resignation) yet but I will have to consider ..." he added.

"I tried to stop him. I want him to continue," Dr Mahathir said, noting that Dr Ling has done a great job especially in promoting the country's ports.

"In fact, the port (Port Klang) has achieved more than 200 per cent growth in business since he handled the matter himself.

"He (Dr Ling) is a good minister. I will be sorry to lose him. But then, I cannot stop him if he is determined to do so (resign)," he said, suggesting that Dr Ling might want to provide opportunities for younger leaders in the party.

"He (Dr Ling) thinks by his giving way to new blood, MCA will be stronger."

To a question whether there will be a reshuffle in the Cabinet, the Prime Minister said: "If he (Dr Ling) is no longer in the Cabinet, we will have to replace him. But at the moment, I have not thought about it".

Asked if the decision was related to expectations with regards to "rewards" for the party's contribution to the BN victory in the last general elections, Dr Mahathir said:

"I don't know about rewards, but I think we have given MCA proper treatment. It is not just a question of rewards, we recognise the role of MCA.

"I don't think we can start shuffling (Cabinet post allocations) because once we do that, we would have a lot of problems with others."

Dr Mahathir was also asked how he felt about Dr Ling being a party leader without a government post.

"I don't know the details ... if he is still the (MCA) president or not. I will talk to him," he said.

"I think he plays a very important role in the Government. I respect him and I appreciate his work but of course the final decision lies with him ... I should have met him today but I was unable to see him."

In the statement to reporters at the MCA headquarters, Lim said:

"The president informed the meeting that he felt that he has served as a Cabinet Minister for a long time and that this is now the right time for him to retire.

"We felt that his services as a senior minister representing the Chinese

community and the party are irreplaceable.

"We further expressed full confidence that under his leadership, the present problems within the party will be fully and amicably resolved."

Bernama reports: Asked for the reasons for his resignation, Dr Ling would only say "the time has not come to disclose that".

He said he had submitted his resignation letter to the Prime Minister last week and was holding firm to his decision.

He was speaking to reporters after meeting a party delegation who had called on him at the Transport Ministry to persuade him to withdraw his resignation.

The delegation was led by Lim. Others in the team included vice-presidents Datuk Ong Ka Ting, Datuk Fong Chan Onn and Datuk Chan Kong Choy.

Dr Ling had walked out of the party's presidential council meeting earlier after announcing his decision.

On Dr Mahathir's response, Dr Ling would only say it was a "very good discussion".

As for how he felt after announcing his decision, he said: "Very happy because the time to go has come".

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