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Dr Ling to take two weeks leave (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik was advised by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to go on two weeks' leave to reflect on his decision to resign as Transport Minister.

At an early morning meeting lasting about 15 minutes with the Prime Minister, Dr Ling was told to "think things over very, very carefully" and then "come back (with a decision)."

Speaking to reporters at his ministry after returning from the meeting in Putrajaya, Dr Ling, who has served the Cabinet for 14 years, was told by the Prime Minister that he should stay in Government.

"He thinks I should stay. He has told me to keep my letter of resignation which I was supposed to give him today," Dr Ling said.

Dr Ling had on Monday chaired an MCA presidential council meeting when he announced his decision to quit the Cabinet. Declaring that his decision was final, Dr Ling said it was "irrevocable" and had to be "respected."

Top MCA leaders, members, supporters and colleagues in Government and politics then pleaded with Dr Ling to stay. In fact, Dr Mahathir also voiced the same feelings when asked to comment on the matter yesterday.

The Prime Minister repeated his plea today when speaking to reporters after launching the National Exhibition and Convention Centre in Subang in the evening.

(Dr Ling was also scheduled to attend but did not show up).

Dr Mahathir said he had nearly accepted Dr Ling's decision to resign as he initially thought that the MCA, the second biggest component in the ruling coalition, did not want him anymore.

However, a meeting Dr Mahathir had with MCA deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek and vice-presidents Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn and Datuk Chan Kong Choy yesterday convinced him otherwise.

He was also convinced that the MCA's internal problems could be easily resolved following his meeting with the delegation.

"They told me that the MCA members still wanted Dr Ling to lead the party and that they wanted him back," he said, adding that he tried to persuade Dr Ling to stay on but the MCA president asked for time to think it over.

Asked whether he had received Dr Ling's resignation letter, Dr Mahathir said he did not want it until the latter had made up his mind.

Asked if Dr Ling's decision to resign was linked to the party not being given additional positions in the Government, Dr Mahathir said MCA did not make such a demand in the first place.

"They understand that if I increase their positions (in the Cabinet), others will also ask for more."

Asked for the probable reason for Dr Ling's shock move, he said the MCA chief felt that the party wanted change. "I suppose he got the impression that they (members) want to have a change. He doesn't want to stand in their way."

"There were also rumours that others in the MCA were supposed to be made ministers but were not. All this made Dr Ling very uneasy," he said, adding that there were also rumours about his family matters and that he was unhappy about them too.

Dr Ling, who attended today's Cabinet meeting, said he would make a final decision after his leave but insisted as of now, there was no change in his decision.

"He (Dr Mahathir) was very, very kind. He told me that although he had agreed last week that I could resign, he now thinks that I should not go, especially after observing the reaction nationwide.

"I am very touched by the overwhelming requests and expressions of support. In all fairness, I must take note of that," Dr Ling said.

MCA vice-presidents Datuk Chua Jui Meng (Health Minister), Fong (Human Resources Minister) and Ong (Housing and Local Government Minister) were also present at his Press conference.

Ong pointed out that all three MCA leaders present at the Press conference had attended the Cabinet meeting. They then came back to the Ministry together.

Lim, former Human Resources Minister who did not seek re-election at the Nov 29 general election, and Chan, who is Deputy Finance Minister, were not present.

Asked to comment on some critics' views that his resignation as "a Chinese opera", Dr Ling said these were "disenchanted" people. "Every leader has got 30 per cent against him. Everything you do, they will say the opposite. That's their role, so don't get worked up."

Dr Ling said he would submit his leave application soon and expected to begin his holiday in a day or two. He hinted that he might go to Sabah or Sarawak.

Asked if his resignation would jeopardise efforts to improve transport infrastructure, he said, "no man is indispensable."

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