

23/05/2000

Ling quits Cabinet post (HL)

Carolyn Hong; Chow Kum Hor

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik has resigned as Transport Minister after informing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last week.

Despite appeals from MCA leaders, Dr Ling, who has served the Cabinet for 14 years, said his decision was final.

He will, however, retain his post as MCA president.

The MP for Labis declined to give reasons for his decision which surprised many people including top MCA leaders, supporters and members.

Dr Ling dropped the bombshell when he chaired the MCA presidential council meeting at party headquarters in Jalan Ampang today.

It is learnt that deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek, who had a bitter quarrel with Dr Ling at a party meeting a month ago, was the first to ask him to reconsider.

Dr Ling replied that he had made up his mind and that party vice-president Datuk Chan Kong Choy can have the (Cabinet) post.

He maintained that his decision was "irrevocable" and wanted it to be "respected".

After announcing his decision, Dr Ling left the meeting and returned to his Ministry in Jalan Dungun.

The shocked council members continued the meeting chaired by Lim, the former Human Resource Minister who did not seek re-election at the last general election.

They passed a unanimous resolution rejecting the resignation and appealing to the party president to stay on.

A statement issued by the council read: "We feel that his services as a senior minister representing the Chinese community and the party is irreplaceable.

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

Accompanied by Chan and other leaders, Lim went straight to Dr Ling's office to make another appeal.

Others who streamed in were Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn (Human Resource Minister), Dr Sak Cheng Lum, Datuk Ong Ka Ting (Housing and Local Government Minister), Datuk Lau Yin Pin, Datuk Wong See Wah, Donald Lim (Transport Ministry Parliamentary Secretary), Datuk Chor Chee Heung (Deputy Home Minister), Datuk Wira Gan Boon Leong and Datuk Hon Choong Kim (Deputy Education Minister).

As he left Dr Ling's office, Lim told reporters that they had told Dr Ling that his decision was not "acceptable".

The presidential council, which included many central committee members, wanted him to stay on.

Asked if Dr Ling will reconsider, Lim said: "I definitely hope so. We can only pray."

Chan, who left soon after, also told reporters the same but refused to say more, muttering "Why is the lift so slow?" and rushed in when the doors finally opened.

Dr Ling, looking sombre yet self-confident, finally emerged after the others had left and had to fight his way past reporters to get to the lift to leave his office.

Repeatedly asked why he had resigned, Dr Ling said: "I am going in a very happy mood because my time to go has come ... I am not here to debate

this anymore."

He said he had informed Dr Mahathir last week and they had a "good discussion".

Having managed to enter the lift, Dr Ling quickly backed into a corner and shook his head as he said "no change" when asked if he would reconsider following the strong appeal from top party leaders.

(END)