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PM: No extra seat for MCA (HL)

Sarban Singh; Sajahan Waheed

SERDANG, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the MCA will not be given any additional Cabinet post but may nominate someone else to replace Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik if the Transport Minister insists on resigning.

The Prime Minister said giving another seat to the MCA, the second biggest component in the Barisan Nasional, would upset other members of the ruling coalition.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on Dr Ling's announcement and a statement the MCA president made yesterday that the party's problems was due to insufficient positions in the Cabinet.

Dr Mahathir said: "The MCA may have done well in the last general election... but today one does well, the next day one does not do so well.

"(And) When the MCA did not do so well (as in the 1990 election), we did not reduce their representation... it is very bad to try and respond to a certain situation without thinking about the future of the party," he added.

Dr Mahathir hinted that MCA vice-president Datuk Chan Kong Choy, who is Deputy Finance Minister, may be made a full minister if nominated by the MCA in the event Dr Ling could not be persuaded to stay.

Dr Mahathir said he would study Dr Ling's recommendation that Chan, who is also Pahang MCA chief, be given a Cabinet post.

Apart from Dr Ling, the MCA's other representatives in the Cabinet are Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn, Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng and Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting.

The Prime Minister said the present problem in the MCA arose after former Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek, who was from Pahang, decided to give up his Cabinet post before the November general election.

"The problem is when Ah Lek decided to withdraw (from the Cabinet), Pahang had no representative and the Cabinet post was given to someone who was not from Pahang," he told reporters after opening the Third Asia-Africa Forum.

The other Pahang MCA MPs are Deputy Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen (Wanita MCA chief) and Fu Ah Kiow, International Trade and Industry Ministry Parliamentary Secretary.

Asked whether he had accepted Dr Ling's resignation, Dr Mahathir said he has not been officially informed. "If possible, I want him to stay on as he is a very experienced man ... has 14 years experience and has done a good job especially in ports and shipping," he said, adding that it would be a loss if someone with such experience quits.

Dr Mahathir said Dr Ling could still attend tomorrow's Cabinet meeting if he wanted to.

On whether there would be a Cabinet reshuffle if he accepted Dr Ling's resignation, Dr Mahathir said some adjustments would have to be made to fill the position.

"There has to be some adjustment ... maybe appoint someone with experience. Someone new will have to replace him (the person replacing Dr Ling)," he said.

As to whether the Transport Ministry would be given to the MCA, Dr Mahathir said this was not necessarily so.

"Previously, it has also been held by other parties. We need to assess

who is really qualified to fill the post because it is a very important one ... we have big plans to further develop the transportation industry," he said, adding that it was crucial for an experienced person to fill the post.

Asked whether Dr Ling's resignation could have an impact on the Chinese votes in the coming Teluk Kemang by-election, Dr Mahathir said this would not happen.

"This (resignation) happens off and on in any political party ... people come and go but it is the party that remains," he said.

Asked whether this was a strategy by Dr Ling to solve the party's internal problems, Dr Mahathir said he did not wish to speculate.

Asked whether he would accept Lim (Ah Lek) if he wished to make a comeback, Dr Mahathir said this was up to the MCA.

"If they propose, I will surely consider," he added.

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