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Succession proposal for Ling (HL)

Chow Kum Hor

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - MCA deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek suggested today that party president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik take a cue from Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and formulate a phase-out retirement and succession plan.

Lim said he himself was prepared to vacate his party post.

"Dr Mahathir has set a fine example for other Barisan Nasional component parties," he told reporters after opening the 39th MCA Youth annual general assembly.

Lim said a succession plan would allow younger people a chance to serve the party.

The former Human Resources Minister said MCA should have thought about the succession plan long ago to ensure smooth transition of power to the party's second echelon.

"I have served under him (Dr Mahathir) for 10 years. He has been grooming people to take over. He groomed (Datuk Seri) Anwar Ibrahim but later found that he was not suitable. That's why he (Dr Mahathir) delayed his departure," he added.

He said the second echelon leaders in MCA were already in place and ready to take over.

Asked to identify them, Lim said all central committee members were eligible.

On when MCA's succession plan should be formulated and announced, Lim said it was all up to Dr Ling.

"If I were the president, I would tell you. In fact, if I were the president, I would have left. We must allow younger people to take over. A leader must be bold enough to make the right decision," he added.

Asked if he was ready to vacate his party post, Lim said: "I would if it was for the good of the party. We must allow younger people to take over. Why not?"

Lim said party leaders must be magnanimous as the party did not belong to any individual, but to one million members.

Asked how top party leaders should be selected, Lim said they should be voted by the general assembly and not the central committee.

Under the party's constitution, any vacancy in the central committee, including the president and deputy's posts, can be filled through a vote by the 40-member committee.

On Tuesday, the Umno supreme council met and supported Dr Mahathir's decision to step down and the confirmation that his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will succeed him in October 2003.

The special meeting chaired by Abdullah endorsed the time-frame to enable a smooth transition of power to take place.

The supreme council met following Dr Mahathir's shocking announcement last Saturday at the closing of the 56th Umno general assembly that he would resign from all government and party posts.

Following persuasion and appeals from the supreme council, Dr Mahathir retracted his decision an hour later. The retraction was announced by Abdullah.

As for MCA, since late 2000, Dr Ling and Lim were said to have held a series of discussions on the party's succession but talks broke down in February 2001 following disagreement between the two.

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