

18 SEP 2003

Mahathir-Tribute

PM THANKS DR LING FOR ADVANCEMENT IN NATION'S TRANSPORT SECTOR

PUTRAJAYA, Sept 18 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight paid a glowing tribute to former Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik for his contributions in advancing Malaysia's transport sector.

The Prime Minister said that Dr Ling's greatest achievement was turning Malaysia into a major port of call for international shipping lines.

"I really appreciate his service when he was in the Cabinet. He was an able minister and was successful in carrying out his duties," he said at a special farewell reception for Dr Ling at Seri Perdana here.

Also present were the prime minister's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who has just returned from a visit to China, Dr Ling's wife Datin Seri Ena Ling and members of the Cabinet.

Dr Ling bowed out after 17 years at the helm of the Transport Ministry and was replaced by Datuk Chan Kong Choy (former Deputy Finance Minister and current MCA deputy president) in a cabinet reshuffle announced by Dr Mahathir on June 24.

Dr Mahathir praised Dr Ling, who incidentally celebrated his 60th birthday today, for his hands-on approach in seeking more clientele for the nation's numerous ports, resulting in a stupendous increase in the number of containers they collectively handled.

"This is really a big contribution that Dr Ling has given to the country. And I would like to congratulate him," he said, adding that the former minister was also responsible in the development and success of the nation's airports.

Dr Mahathir said he refused to accept Dr Ling's earlier request to leave the Cabinet because he thought that he still had so much to contribute.

Dr Ling also stepped down as MCA president on May 23 and was succeeded by Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, who is Housing and Local Government Minister.

He has since been appointed as MCA permanent honorary president and now devotes much of his time to the MCA-backed Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (Utar) in his capacity as its chairman.

Dr Mahathir said that a leader should not cling to his or her position for too long.

"When we receive and understand the signs, then we should accept that the time for us to go has come and we should make way for others," he said.

The prime minister said it was only proper for those who had left to return the support of those who replaced them.

"Our struggle is continuous because we are racing against other countries. So we need to ensure that those who succeed us will be equally successful in advancing the programmes and development of our country," Dr Mahathir said.

In his reply, Dr Ling said that what struck him most was how business-friendly the Cabinet was.

He said: "We want to make sure that the task of doing business here is easy so that everybody can make money."

Dr Ling also commended his former Cabinet colleagues for acting quickly to resolve any problem.

He also said that after 27 years in the government service, it was only with honour and happiness that he was saying goodbye.

Dr Mahathir and other guests later joined Dr Ling in the cake-cutting

ceremony to mark his birthday.

-- BERNAMA

MAM YBY