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All party appointees will be retained, says Ong

Chow Kum Hor

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Newly-elected MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting today said he would retain all party office-bearers appointed by his predecessor, but declined to say if he would propose changes to the government line-up, involving party leaders, to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"I would like to retain all appointments made by Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik," Ong, who is also Housing and Local Government Minister, told reporters when asked about the fate of the appointees.

Ong was with his predecessor, Dr Ling, who held a Press conference to explain the rationale behind his resignation yesterday.

Among the presidential appointees provided for under the MCA constitution are secretary-general (held by Datuk Seri Dr Ting Chew Peh under the previous leadership), treasurer-general (Tan Sri William Chek) and national organising secretary (Datuk Ong Ka Chuan), all automatically central committee members.

The other appointees are the State liaison committee chairmen and the bureau chairmen.

When pressed to say if there was a need to propose a reshuffle of MCA government office-bearers, like replacing an MCA minister, Ong was tight-lipped. "No comments for these two days," he said.

Speculation is rife that deputy president Datuk Chan Kong Choy, who is also Deputy Finance Minister, will be elevated to a full minister following the changing of guard in MCA last night.

The MCA is allocated four ministerial posts, but Transport Minister Dr Ling last year tendered an undated resignation letter to the Prime Minister and left it to Dr Mahathir to decide when he (Dr Ling) should leave.

The other MCA ministers are vice-presidents Datuk Chua Jui Meng (Health) and Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn (Human Resources).

By convention, the president of a BN component party proposes the nominees from the party to fill government posts, including ministers, deputy ministers and parliamentary secretaries. It is the prerogative of the Prime Minister to accept the recommendations.

Ong and Chan were vice-presidents until last night when the MCA central committee elected them to fill the party's top two posts.

This followed the committee's failure to convince Dr Ling and deputy president Datuk Seri Lim Ah Lek to reconsider their decision to step down yesterday.

Ong is seen as aligned to Dr Ling who headed the Team A faction in the crisis while Lim, who led Team B, had favoured Chan to take over the party leadership.

The crisis was sparked partly because of the failure to resolve the succession issue and dissatisfaction over allocation of ministerial posts.