

23/05/2003

Dr Ling says he's stepping down as MCA president today

Chow Kum Hor

PUTRAJAYA, Thurs. - MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik today confirmed he would step down from his post tomorrow after 17 years in power.

The focus now shifts to the choice of his successor, with vice-presidents Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting and Datuk Chan Kong Choy the front-runners.

Deputy president Datuk Seri Lim Ah Lek is also expected to tender his resignation tomorrow as part of the peace plan brokered by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Lim could not be reached for confirmation.

However, sources said Dr Ling's move was just a sandiwara.

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating. The MCA central committee has been told to reject it (Dr Ling's resignation)," a source said.

However, another source said it would be unwise for Dr Ling to renege on his pledge to resign.

"I believe he will do what he has promised Dr Mahathir," the source said.

Dr Ling's announcement this afternoon at the Transport Ministry came barely hours after Ong and Chan met Dr Mahathir at the Prime Minister's Department in the morning.

There is no confirmation on what the meeting was about. It is speculated that the two briefed Dr Mahathir on the latest developments.

"My mind is made up. I am not going to change my mind. We (my supporters and I) have discussed that the reason for my resignation is to pave the way for the younger generation to take my place," said Dr Ling, 59, who is also Transport Minister, after meeting about 100 supporters from Kedah, Perlis and Kelantan.

They had gone there to appeal to him not to step down.

Describing his resignation as a "correct step", Dr Ling expressed the hope that his supporters would accept his reasons.

Asked if 60-year-old Lim, his rival in the three-year-old party crisis, would also be stepping down as spelt out in the peace plan, he said he could not speak on behalf of other people.

On who would succeed him, Dr Ling said: "I will let you know tomorrow. The central committee can decide on that. Let's not go into the details."

The central committee - the highest executive body in the party - which is scheduled to meet tomorrow at Wisma MCA at noon, is expected to iron out the succession issue.

Under the party constitution, any vacancies involving elected national-level office-bearers can be filled by the central committee members who will choose among themselves who to take over.

Dr Ling's confirmation today came after a series of meetings between him and State leaders who had appealed to him over the past 48 hours to reconsider his decision to quit.

The simultaneous resignation of Dr Ling and Lim is one of the major points in the peace plan drafted in April 2002 by Dr Mahathir, with the assistance of Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and businessmen Tan Sri Lim Kok Wing and Tan Sri Lee Kim Yew.

The other main points are that the Team B faction agreed to call off its extraordinary general meeting and the party's membership registry should be cleared of any phantom members.

Dr Mahathir mediated in the crisis upon appeals from both Team A and Team B factions after a protracted split that was sparked off by a breakdown in succession talks between Dr Ling and Lim.

Dr Ling favoured Ong to take over, while Chan is seen as Lim's protege.