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Party will decide on me, says Gerakan chief

PANTAI REMIS, Mon. - Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said today his political career would be decided by the party's central committee.

Dr Lim, who has been Gerakan chief since 1980, said he had voiced his wish to resign at the party conference in 2000.

"But my central committee asked me to shut up," he said after attending the Maha Mariamman temple consecration ceremony at Ladang UIE Sungai Batu, near here, today.

Dr Lim said this in response to a feature article in a Malay daily (Mingguan Malaysia) yesterday which highlighted him (Dr Lim) as among the Barisan Nasional politicians who had been in the Government for a long time.

"They (central committee) will determine when I will retire," he said.

Dr Lim is a former Minister of Social (Special) Functions in the Cabinet of the late Tun Abdul Razak Hussein from 1972 to 1973 but he resigned to protest against the expulsion of several MCA "reform movement" leaders. He joined the Gerakan in 1974.

Dr Lim, 64, contested on an MCA-Alliance ticket in the 1969 general election for the Pekan Baru state seat but lost to Chan Yoon Onn of the People's Progressive Party, which was then a major opposition party in Perak.

He won the Jalong state seat in the 1978 general election and retained it in 1982. He was appointed Primary Industries Minister in 1986.

In Kuala Lumpur, MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said each Barisan Nasional component party had its own constitution and system to deal with the question of leadership and representation.

He said leaders of all Barisan Nasional component parties should, therefore, not be subjected to the statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday that all Umno elected representatives should resign to enable the formation of a new line-up.

"They have their own approach and system of operation and we have to abide by it. The leaders of each component party, too, have to answer to their members."

Samy Vellu, the Works Minister, said Dr Mahathir's statement was probably intended for Umno's elected representatives.

"He (Dr Mahathir) can say that to Umno's elected representatives because he is the party leader."

He said this when asked to comment on Dr Mahathir's statement that Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi should be given the opportunity to form his own line-up for the next general election.

Samy Vellu became a minister in October 1979, holding the Works and Utilities portfolio.

He was MIC acting president in 1979 and endorsed as party president in 1981.

"By March, it will be decided if I remain as party president. MIC is having its branch elections and our presidential election will be in March.

"If the members do not want me, I will say thank you and bye bye. It will be decided over the next 45 days."

Asked if he would name new faces in the next election, Samy Vellu said MIC had been fielding new faces in every election. "Only thing is that

nobody notices it."

Indian Progressive Front (IPF) president Datuk M.G. Pandithan said Samy Vellu should take the cue from Dr Mahathir's statement and step down graciously before he was forced to do so.

"Samy Vellu should opt to go on his own. He has been in the Cabinet for almost a quarter of a century.

"If Dr Mahathir himself, who is such a remarkable leader, is willing to retire, why are the other leaders determined to stay on despite having served for such a long term?" Pandithan asked.

He said it was time for Samy Vellu to hand over the party reins to his deputy Datuk S. Subramaniam, who has vast experience and is the longest-serving deputy minister.

"Subramaniam has the ability and would surely be a good choice to lead the Indians. He has proven himself.

"The Indian community wants a new leader in the Cabinet as Samy Vellu has overstayed. No one should think that without him, the party will not survive."

In Petaling Jaya, People's Progressive Party president Datuk M. Kayveas said Dr Mahathir's statement was timely and it should not only involve Umno leaders but also those of other BN component parties.

"I don't think the proposal should be limited to Umno leaders alone. Everyone should follow, and for us in PPP, we have no problem in moving aside and handing over to new leaders.

"It is not the age factor alone but the ability to serve and contribute," said Kayveas, the Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister.

MCA vice-president Datuk Chan Kong Choy said he welcomed Dr Mahathir's statement as it would give Abdullah the opportunity to choose those with whom he is comfortable and able to work with.

"Abdullah should be given a free hand as I am sure he will make a wise decision.

"Dr Mahathir is sincere in handing over the country's leadership to Abdullah and his statement proves this point."