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PM accepts resignation, Ling going on leave

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PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has accepted Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik's resignation as Transport Minister.

The resignation will take effect after Dr Mahathir appoints Dr Ling's replacement in a Cabinet reshuffle.

Dr Ling, who has served for more than 17 years in the Cabinet, will go on leave to Melbourne, Australia, starting tomorrow.

The acceptance of Dr Ling's resignation came in the wake of his resignation as MCA president on Friday.

"I leave office as a very, very happy man with a lot of joy and gratitude in my heart," said the 59-year-old Dr Ling before chairing his ministry's post-Cabinet meeting.

Dr Ling had on Aug 15, last year, submitted his resignation letter to Dr Mahathir.

He cited having accomplished numerous tasks in the Government, including having contributed to the development of Malaysian ports and the aviation industry besides his role in the setting up of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman.

The undated resignation letter was sent four months after the return of his one-time confidant Datuk Soh Chee Wen, who had accused Dr Ling of several wrongdoings, including having offered to sell classified documents to a foreign businessman.

There is no word on Dr Ling's replacement but it is widely speculated that MCA deputy president and Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Chan Kong Choy will fill the MCA ministerial slot, although not necessarily the Transport portfolio.

The other MCA ministers are party president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting (Housing and Local Government) and vice-presidents Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn (Human Resources) and Datuk Chua Jui Meng (Health).

This morning, Dr Ling who attended his last Cabinet meeting, submitted two letters to Dr Mahathir - one reaffirming his decision to step down as Transport Minister and another applying for leave from tomorrow.

Ong, who was elected MCA president on Friday, will be the acting Transport Minister in the interim.

Asked about his plans, Dr Ling said he would catch up on his reading and "improve on my golf".

"I am still young. I will be looking for a third career," said the doctor-turned-politician, but refused to shed light on what fields he planned to venture into.

On his replacement in the Cabinet, Dr Ling said it was the prerogative of the Prime Minister. He added that he was prepared to offer advice to MCA leaders if they needed it.

Dr Ling first stood in the general election in 1974 and won the Mata Kuching parliamentary seat. Two years later, he was made Local Government and Federal Territory Parliamentary Secretary.

He has also served as Deputy Minister for Information, Education and Finance, before being appointed Transport Minister on Jan 3, 1986.

Dr Ling is Labis MP but has said he will not seek re-election in the next polls.

On Friday, Dr Ling submitted his resignation from the party simultaneously with former deputy president Datuk Seri Lim Ah Lek.