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I had plans to retire in 1999, says Keng Yaik

Sarban Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said he had indicated to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad his intention to retire from the Government back in 1999.

He said he informed the Prime Minister of his intention even before Dr Mahathir announced his plan to retire in June last year.

But Dr Lim said as Dr Mahathir would himself be retiring in October and Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik having resigned as MCA president and Transport Minister, it would not be proper for him to follow suit immediately as there would not be many senior ministers left in the Cabinet.

"If all the senior ministers were to retire at the same time from Pak Lah's (Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) Cabinet, the only senior member left would be Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu," he said.

He said this during the informal nasi bungkus session with New Straits Times senior editors and journalists at Balai Berita here today.

New Straits Times group editor Datuk Ahmad A. Talib was also present.

Dr Lim however did not indicate whether he would be contesting in the next general election.

He had indicated his desire to retire from the Cabinet in an interview with the NST in June 1997.

Dr Lim has been Primary Industries Minister since August 1986. He was first appointed to the Cabinet in 1972 as Minister with Special Functions when the late Tun Abdul Razak was Prime Minister.

The following year, he resigned in protest against the MCA leadership over the expulsion of a few leaders.

He then joined Gerakan in December the same year and was Perak executive councillor from 1978 to 1986.

Although a party president, Dr Lim did not have any ministerial post between 1980 and 1986, preferring to hand it to party deputy president Datuk Paul Leong.

The 64-year-old veteran politician had on several occasions voiced his desire to step down but these were always met with objections from party members who strongly felt Dr Lim still had a lot to offer to the party and the Barisan Nasional.

Asked who would take over from him as party president after his retirement, Dr Lim said the obvious choice would be his deputy, Datuk Seri Kerk Choo Ting.

"We are now laying the foundation for my deputy to take over. But I don't know whether he would be challenged by anyone," he said.

On another note, Dr Lim said Gerakan is a multi-racial party although it is dominated by the Chinese.

"We are a multi-racial party and our approach is not racial. We want to promote the concept of Bangsa Malaysia as outlined in Vision 2020."