

24/05/2003

Ka Ting is new MCA chief (HL)

Chow Kum Hor; Patrick Sennyah

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting was tonight elected as MCA's seventh president, with Datuk Chan Kong Choy as his deputy.

The elevation of the two leaders seen as proteges of Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, who headed the Team A faction, and Datuk Seri Lim Ah Lek, who led Team B, is expected to put an end to the protracted crisis in the second largest party in the Barisan Nasional.

The central committee unanimously voted for Ong, 47, and Chan, 48, after the committee failed to persuade past president Dr Ling and his deputy Lim to reconsider their decision to step down.

At the start of today's meeting which began at noon, Dr Ling and Lim tendered their resignation before they left the conference room on the ninth floor of Wisma MCA together.

Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn, who is the most senior of MCA's four vice-presidents, then took over the chair.

At a Press conference at 1.45pm, Fong said 37 central committee members were in favour of rejecting the resignations while one abstained.

It is learnt that the sole abstention vote came from Youth chief Datuk Ong Tee Keat.

"The central committee discussed their resignation, and in light of the vast contributions by both parties, the CC rejected their letters of resignation," said Fong, who is also Human Resources Minister.

The central committee tasked Fong, treasurer-general Tan Sri William Chek and Datuk Dr Chua Soi Lek to appeal to Dr Ling to reconsider while Datuk Fu Ah Kiow, Datuk Tang See Hang and Datuk Dr Yeow Chai Thiam were told to persuade Lim.

Fong then adjourned the meeting to 8pm, pending the efforts to convince Dr Ling and Lim to change their minds.

When the committee met again at night, the delegation reported that the duo were adamant in wanting to leave.

"We spent a long time trying to convince Dr Ling and Lim to stay. In spite of our efforts, we were not able to do so," Fong said after the committee met for barely 30 minutes.

The committee then voted for Ong to assume the number one post with Chan as his deputy. Ong Tee Keat and vice-president Datuk Chua Jui Meng were absent during the meeting.

Chua sent his apologies as he was at a function where the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail was also present.

The reject-and-appeal-to-reconsider move by the central committee has been dismissed as a "charade" to pave a graceful exit for Dr Ling and Lim.

Several delegations had in the past 72 hours appealed to Dr Ling to stay.

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

Ong Ka Ting, after being declared by Fong as the new president, said he accepted the new challenging assignments with mixed feelings as he was saddened by the sudden resignation of Dr Ling and Lim.

"Forget about factional politics of the past. It's time to consolidate and move ahead," he read from a prepared text.

Chan also pledged to work hard for the party and help members close

ranks. Both leaders also expressed willingness to co-operate with each other.

The simultaneous resignation of Dr Ling and Lim is one of the major points in the MCA peace plan drafted in April 2002 by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and businessmen Tan Sri Lim Kok Wing and Tan Sri Lee Kim Yew were also part of the mediating team.

The other main points were 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.