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Less than meets the eye

IT is actually straightforward: Datuk Chan Kong Choy has been appointed Transport Minister, a post vacant since Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik resigned four weeks ago. It is a logical move, too, given the fact that Chan, previously a deputy minister, is now deputy president of the MCA, the party which traditionally gets the Transport Minister's position. But, of course, you can't run away from the doubting Thomases who are coming up with their interpretations and theories on what is essentially the Prime Minister's prerogative.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, when making the announcement on Tuesday, pointed out quite categorically that the appointment of Chan, together with the promotion and reassignment of three other MCA leaders as deputy ministers and one as parliamentary secretary, was simply to fill up vacancies and not to pacify factions in the party which is going through a rather fragile peace.

Very little, if at all, should be read into the fact that Team B's Chan is given the Transport portfolio, which is perceived by many to be a more senior position in the Cabinet than Housing and Local Government, occupied by Team A's Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, the new MCA president. In the first place, it is actually a matter of opinion as to which of the two portfolios is "more senior" as all ministries are important in their own way. Furthermore, Chan's appointment was wellreceived by other MCA leaders, including Ong. And very little too should be read into the transfer of deputy minister Datuk M. Kayveas from the Housing and Local Government Ministry to the Prime Minister's Department, even if the move came just after his expose of alleged wrongdoing in the Ampang Jaya Municipal Council.

It should be clear enough that Dr Mahathir wanted as little movement as possible in the Cabinet, opting to just fill up a vacancy instead of a more comprehensive reshuffle. Reading too much into this would be nothing more than a mere academic exercise.