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Ling announces resignation (HL)

By Chow Kum Hor; Patrick Sennyah

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik today announced that he submitted an undated letter to the Prime Minister last year, resigning his Cabinet post as Transport Minister.

The letter was sent on Aug 15 and the resignation will take effect once Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad accepts and fixes the date for Dr Ling, who has served as a Minister for 17 years, to step down.

Dr Ling announced this to the media after today's BN supreme council meeting, chaired by Dr Mahathir.

The 59-year-old Dr Ling, embroiled in a protracted party crisis, said Dr Mahathir had told coalition leaders at the meeting that he had received Dr Ling's resignation letter.

However, at a Press conference after the council meeting, BN chairman Dr Mahathir did not mention Dr Ling's resignation letter.

Dr Ling said after his unsuccessful bid to resign from the Cabinet in May 2000, he again toyed with the idea of retiring last year.

"I told the PM I was ready to leave and he asked me when, and I told him anytime after the official launch of Utar (Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman).

"The official launch took place on Aug 13 last year and on Aug 15 my letter went in. I am very grateful to the Prime Minister, to BN and the country. It is only with gratitude that when the time comes for me to leave, I will be happy to go," Dr Ling, the longest-serving party president, said.

On the reason for his retirement, Dr Ling said he had wanted to leave in 2000 but was dissuaded. However, he said, with the setting up of Utar, he had completed a large part, if not all, of his agenda.

"I don't think I can do much more."

He said his resignation would only involve his Cabinet post. His position in the MCA and questions of succession would be dealt with within the party, including the central committee, scheduled to meet next Wednesday.

Dr Ling, head of the party's "Team A" faction, said his announcement today had nothing to do with his deputy Datuk Seri Lim Ah Lek's announcement, a day earlier, of wanting to challenge Dr Ling for the presidency in the party polls scheduled for 2005. Lim is the leader of the rival "Team B" faction.

Asked whether the resignation had anything to do with any pending court cases, Dr Ling said he had won all his cases, all of which were filed for malicious reasons.

"I am looking for a third career. I have enjoyed national service. I think it is time the younger ones took over," the doctor-turned-politician said.

Dr Ling said he was prepared to leave his post and lead a retiree's life.

He first tendered his resignation in May 2000, purportedly to make way for vice-president Datuk Chan Kong Choy to fill his (Dr Ling's) ministerial post.

Following strong opposition from party leaders and the grassroots, he retracted his decision after taking a two-week leave in Australia.

The party later split in a leadership crisis that saw the formation of the Team A and Team B factions. Prolonged and intense rivalry saw the BN

leadership intervening, culminating in the Prime Minister's "peace plan", first announced in April last year.

It is learnt that both factions met tonight following Dr Ling's announcement.

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