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Ong tipped to take over transport portfolio

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Newly-elected MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting is tipped to be the next Transport Minister while deputy president Datuk Chan Kong Choy will likely be made Housing and Local Government Minister.

It is learnt that MCA vice-presidents Datuk Chua Jui Meng and Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn will retain their portfolios in the Health and Human Resources Ministries respectively, in the impending Cabinet reshuffle following the resignation of Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik as Transport Minister yesterday.

"The Transport Minister's post is the most senior Cabinet post MCA has. This is followed by Housing and Local Government. So, by right, Ong will be made Transport Minister while Chan the Housing and Local Government Minister," a source said today.

Parliamentary Secretary Datuk Fu Ah Kiow and Ipoh Barat MP C.S. Ho are likely to be promoted following the almost certain promotion of Chan.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad accepted Dr Ling's resignation from the Cabinet following his resignation from the MCA last Friday.

Party sources said Chan's promotion would probably see Fu being promoted to fill the deputy ministership left vacant by Chan. Ho would then fill the vacant Parliamentary Secretary slot.

"The promotion of the two, if accepted, would show that there is some semblance of fairness in the allocation of posts. One is from Team A and the other from Team B," the insider said.

He added that Chan was too junior to take up the transport portfolio.

"Traditionally, the Transport Minister is considered a senior member of the Cabinet. For his entire tenure as party president, Dr Ling has been heading the ministry. But at the end of the day, Dr Mahathir decides," the source said.

However, the Transport portfolio is not necessarily held by the MCA president. Former acting MCA president Datuk Dr Neo Yee Pan was in charge of Housing and Local Government while the then vice-president Tan Sri Chong Hon Ngian the Transport Minister.

Of the present three MCA Ministers, only Chua is into the second term while Ong and Fong were made ministers after the 1999 general election.

Party leaders have been talking about a fair distribution of the posts so that both Team A and Team B supporters will be pacified.

There are three MCA Parliamentary Secretaries now - Datuk Donald Lim (Transport), Wong Kam Hoong (Domestic Trade and Consumers Affairs) and Fu.

Of the 14 MCA backbenchers, 11 are aligned to Team A.

"If a backbencher were to be promoted to fill up a vacant Parliamentary Secretary seat, those into their second term as MPs will have the edge. But allocation of government posts must also take into consideration where the person is from and his ability."