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Respect Ling's wish, says Lim

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - MCA deputy president Datuk Seri Lim Ah Lek said everyone should respect president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik's wish to resign as Transport Minister.

"This is the second time he has tendered his resignation. Let's respect his wish. For now, we must concentrate on party unity and work closely with the other Barisan Nasional component parties," said Lim, when contacted today.

On whether he would still challenge Dr Ling for the party presidency in 2005, he said: "There is no need to mention it now."

Last Sunday, Lim said if Dr Ling was still president in 2005, when the party election was due, and if there were no other contenders for the party presidency, he (Lim) would challenge Dr Ling.

Lim said he did not expect Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to reveal to the BN supreme council about Dr Ling's resignation letter.

All the four MCA vice-presidents either declined comment or could not be reached.

MCA Youth head Datuk Ong Tee Keat said Dr Ling's proposed resignation would not affect the party's struggle.

Wanita MCA head Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen expressed shock over Dr Ling's announcement and thanked Dr Mahathir for not accepting the resignation yet.

"The president has done a lot for the party and the Chinese community. The most important thing now is for us to unite as we still have unfinished business like Utar (Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman)," she said.

Perak MCA chairman Datuk Ong Ka Chuan said the party still needed Dr Ling's leadership.

"We fully support his leadership and hope he'll continue leading the party," he said.

"Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, as the Prime Minister's successor, will need experienced people to help strengthen the Government."

Kedah MCA urged Dr Ling to continue holding the post until he found a worthy successor.

State MCA chairman Datuk Beh Heng Seong said the time was not right for Dr Ling to resign from the party as the succession issue was still unresolved.

He feared the resignation would result in a scramble for power, which would further weaken the party.

Beh said the messy bickering, which divided the party into two teams and needed Dr Mahathir's personal intervention, was still fresh in the minds of party members.

"We respect Dr Ling's decision to resign from his Cabinet post and we will respect the PM's decision," he said today.

"But it is different for the party. Stepping down at this time will create a free-for-all situation again. It is not good as we are about to face a general election."

Beh said Dr Ling told him his intention in August, during a visit to Kedah. "He told me he wanted to step down after the setting up of Utar but only from the Cabinet post, not the party."

Serdang MP Datuk Yap Pian Hon said Dr Ling was a seasoned politician and he should know the implications of his announcement.

"Everyone should respect the decision. Now, it is up to Dr Mahathir to decide on the date," he said.

Perlis MCA deputy chairman Loh Yoon Foo supported Dr Ling's resignation from the Cabinet and welcomed Lim's return to "active politics".

"This is Dr Ling's second attempt to quit the Cabinet. His decision must, therefore, be respected and supported," Loh, who is Padang Besar MCA division chief, said.

"Let us not make an issue out of this."