

Liow unfazed by 'hell' ministry jinx
Malaysiakini.com
Mar 21, 2008
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New Health Minister Liow Tiong Lai is well-aware but unperturbed by his appointment to a post which many regard as a 'cursed' post for MCA leaders. MCPX

liow tiong laiSpeaking to reporters during his first day at the Health Ministry headquarters in Putrajaya today, Liow calmly refuted suggestions that he would be bothered by the position's tainted past.

"Don't worry about history. The jinx has to break somewhere," he said.

The health minister post is traditionally reserved for MCA, but since 1969, nearly every MCA leader to have held the post had short lived political careers.

The jinx in what MCA members refer to as the 'hell ministry' started in 1969, when then health minister Dr Ng Kam Poh was defeated by rookie DAP candidate Chan Fu King, a bus conductor, for the Teluk Intan parliamentary seat.

Subsequently, a long list of health ministers - Lee Siok Yew, Chin Hon Ngain, Mak Hon Kam, Chan Siang Sun, Ng Cheng Kiat, Lee Kim Sai, Chua Jui Meng and Dr Chua Soi Lek - also had their political careers cut short.

'Passionate ministry'

Liow's predecessor, Soi Lek, was the most recent and sensational casualty.

chua soi lekSoi Lek had admitted in January that he was involved in a sex scandal that was caught on tape. Subsequently, he resigned as health minister, member of parliament and dropped all party posts.

Pressed by reporters, his successor Liow calmly said the health ministry should be regarded as a "passionate ministry".

"We're a passionate ministry. We are here to serve and help people... Don't worry about how people talk about (the ministry)," added the 47-year-old minister, who is also MCA Youth chief.

On a more serious note, Liow stressed that his immediate priority is to ensure that the Health Ministry operates more efficiently and also to reduce average patient waiting time from 40 minutes to 30 minutes.

He would also be looking for ways to retain doctors, especially specialists, in civil service.

E-kesihatan status unknown

However, Liow quickly brushed off questions about the controversial E-kesihatan scheme and proposed health financing schemes.

"I'll respond to this later. Today is my first day on the job," he said to both questions.

While there has been little news on the health financing scheme, there were signs that the Transport Ministry was trying to revive the E-kesihatan scheme which has been objected by various stakeholders.

The scheme aims to appoint a middleman, allegedly linked to the Transport Ministry, to facilitate health checks for commercial vehicle drivers.

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