

# Sabah deputy chief minister quits cabinet

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**KOTA KINABALU:** Tan Sri Chong Kah Kiat yesterday announced his resignation from the Sabah cabinet amid rumours he was at odds with Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman.

At a packed press conference at his office here, Chong offered no reasons for his sudden departure and merely said he was "nobody, not important and nothing".

Chong, who is also tourism, culture and environment minister, had earlier handed his resignation letter to Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Ahmadshah Abdullah at the Istana.

His resignation takes effect Monday.

The Yang di-Pertua Negeri's private secretary Ghafar Madin confirmed the head of state had received the resignation letter and that it would be forwarded to the chief minister.

Under the state constitution, the appointment of members of the state cabinet is made by the Yang di-Pertua Negeri in accordance with the advice of the chief minister.

Chong said he would remain Tanjung Kapur assemblyman.

Talk about Chong's impending resignation started on Thursday afternoon.

Chong did not confirm or deny the differences with

Musa although his tone seemed to suggest that all was not well between him and the chief minister.

"I will only be giving my statement today, which I have prepared myself and it will be good for now."

Asked about his relationship with other members of the cabinet, including the chief minister, Chong said he would have his say when the time came.

"Otherwise I will try to refrain. I am a very patient man. Whenever I can refrain, I will refrain.

"I will stand with what I have been doing all this time in my political life. I will stand by my principles."

The purported rift between Chong and Musa is said to be related to the approval of several projects under Chong's ministry, including the controversial construction of chalets and restaurants on the environmentally sensitive island of Sipadan.

Chong, a Buddhist, was also said to be unhappy over the rejection of his proposal to put up a giant Buddha statue in his hometown in Kudat.

It is also common knowledge that Chong was dissatisfied with the alleged failure to address the problem of illegal immigrants in the state.

Chong had during his tenure as chief minister

launched a massive crack-down against illegal immigrants with thousands of them being arrested and deported.

Chong, who was in a jovial mood and even bantered with reporters at the start and end of the press conference, said he had already conveyed his decision to Musa.

Chong also spoke of his loyalty to the Barisan Nasional.

"Many of you know that I have been in the BN for the last 30 years. I never left the BN. I am one of the politicians who never moved and today I have to take this decision and I will say no more after this."

Chong, who stepped down as Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) president in September last year, said he had been planning an exit for the last three years.

"I have been planning to leave with pride and I have made my decision today."

Asked if he had informed the prime minister and deputy prime minister of his decision, Chong said he did not think it was important because "I am only a small state leader".

He said he had already explained his decision to LDP leaders and that they had accepted it.

Chong's resignation means that the party would no longer be represented in the state cabinet.

Chong said the LDP's ab-

sence did not matter, citing a precedence in 1995 when the party was left without a state minister's position after the resignation of Datuk Kong Hong Ming.

"We have had that experience before. Our party is very small and not important. It does not matter. We will have our principles intact."

Chong, 59, began his political career in 1987 when he joined Parti Berjaya.

He was appointed assistant minister to the chief minister in 1981 after winning the Kudat state seat. He left Berjaya in 1989 to form the LDP which was accepted into the BN fold in 1991.

Chong was made a senator in 1994 and served as minister in the Prime Minister's Department between 1995 and 1999. He was appointed state minister of tourism and environment after winning the Kudat (now Tanjung Kapur) seat in the 1999 state election.

He was made chief minister in 2001 under the state's system of rotating the post among the Muslim Bumiputera, non-Muslim Bumiputera and Chinese.

After retaining the Tanjung Kapur seat in the 2004 election, Chong was appointed to one of the three deputy chief ministerships, holding the tourism, culture and environment portfolio.