

# Ghafar submits

# Dr Mahathir quit letter

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and Saodah Elias

PETALING JAYA, Fri. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight said he had received a letter from Abdul Ghafar Baba, expressing his intention to resign as Deputy Prime Minister.

Ghafar, however, remains as Umno deputy president and would defend his post against Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at the Nov 4 party elections.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said this at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Subang before leaving for an official visit to Malta enroute to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Cyprus.

Asked whether he had made any decision on Ghafar's letter, the Prime Minister said he had not made up his mind yet.

"There's plenty of time to decide ... there's no great hurry," he told the Press.

Asked whether Ghafar was also relinquishing his post as Rural Development Minister, Dr Mahathir said: "No, only as the Deputy Prime Minister."

Asked whether he was surprised by Ghafar's letter, the Prime Minister said: "No, not really ... I've heard rumours."

When asked if Ghafar had given a reason for wanting to resign, Dr Mahathir said: "People resign for a lot of reasons."

He declined to speculate possible reasons for Ghafar's action.

Asked whether Ghafar had contacted him, the Prime Minister said: "No, only his political secretary came to deliver the letter."

When asked for his reaction to Ghafar's move, the Prime Minister said: "Well, we'll have to make prepara-

tions to deal with the situation."

Asked whether anyone would be appointed Acting Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir said: "There's no such position as acting Deputy Prime Minister."

Asked if anyone would act on his behalf during his absence, he quipped: "No, I am still the Prime Minister. They can contact me anytime. In some countries, this could be a problem as there might be a coup. But I don't expect any coup in Malaysia."

Asked whether Ghafar's resignation, if accepted, would affect the Government administration, Dr Mahathir said: "No. Even now he is on leave. Nothing is (adversely) affected."

Remarked by the Press that this was the second time that a Deputy Prime Minister had resigned during his tenure, the Prime Minister said:

"That's because I last too long (laughter) ... I am quite sure if Tun Hussein or Tun Razak had lasted as long, they too might have experienced the same thing."

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to arrive in Malta on Sunday and will proceed to Cyprus on Wednesday for CHOGM.

Dr Mahathir's confirmation came amidst speculation that Ghafar, who did poorly at the Umno divisional meetings, was resigning as Deputy Prime Minister.

Ghafar, who had just completed official visits of China and North Korea, is scheduled to return on Sunday.

The speculation arose following Ghafar's dismal performance at the Umno divisional meetings where he received only seven nominations against Anwar's 143.

The divisions which

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nominated him are Jerlun-Langkawi (Kedah), Kepala Batas (Penang), Segamat, Muar, Johor Baru (Johor), Jasin (Malacca) and Marudu (Sabah).

All the 153 divisions have concluded their meetings but Batu and Labuan have been told to hold fresh meetings because their earlier ones were declared null and void. In their earlier meetings, both divisions had nominated Anwar.

Ghafar's resignation as the Sabah Umno liaison committee head on Sept 30 had further fuelled the speculation.

He said the resignation was mainly because he no longer enjoyed the cooperation of 19 of the 20 Umno divisions in the state.