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Dr Ling to take two weeks' leave

Lokman Mansor; Kamarul Yunus

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he has not accepted Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik's resignation letter and asked the latter to take leave to think over his decision.

Speaking to newsmen after launching the National Exhibition and Convention Centre, formerly Terminal One of the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport in Subang yesterday, he said: "I don't want to receive any letters yet until he makes up his mind. But I told him to think about it because it is a serious matter," he said, adding Dr Ling will take his leave immediately.

Dr Mahathir said MCA leaders who came to see him also want Dr Ling to remain as Transport Minister.

"Initially, I thought MCA does not want Dr Ling and I almost agreed but now, the MCA wants to retain him ... all of them. Because of that, I try to persuade Dr Ling to stay on. This morning, Dr Ling attended the Cabinet meeting. He has not resigned," he said.

Dr Mahathir also dismissed the possibility that Dr Ling's wish to resign was due to his failure to seek an additional ministerial post for MCA.

"MCA did not demand for the additional ministerial post. They understand that if they were granted another post, the other component parties will also ask for more.

"Their leaders, including Datuk Lim Ah Lek, Datuk Ong Ka Ting and Datuk Chan Kong Choy came to see me. All of them want Dr Ling to stay and stressed that MCA did not seek an additional ministerial post," he said.

On reasons for Dr Ling's intention to resign, Dr Mahathir said lots of rumours cropped up, especially those stimulated by the press.

Asked whether it was over personal matters, Dr Mahathir said: "Family matters ... that is what some people are saying. He (Dr Ling) felt uneasy with such talks. I hope he will stay on."

To a question on who will assume the Transport Minister's post while Dr Ling is on his two-week leave, Dr Mahathir said anyone in the Cabinet can take charge of the ministry.

Meanwhile, Dr Ling, who met the press at his Kuala Lumpur office yesterday after the Cabinet meeting, said he will take a two-week leave and will only decide on his resignation upon his return.

"But as of now, there is no change," Dr Ling said.

He said the decision to take leave was on the advice of Dr Mahathir and Cabinet ministers, MCA leaders, party members, and friends. "I am very touched by the overwhelming requests and expressions of support. I wish to go to some quiet place outside the country to think it over."

Dr Ling said Dr Mahathir told him to keep his letter of resignation, which he had intended to submit yesterday.

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