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PM: I'll try to get him to reconsider decision

Patvinder Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will ask Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik to reconsider his decision to resign from the Cabinet.

"Well, I will try to ask him to reconsider his decision. Whether it is welcomed by the MCA or not is another matter ... The final decision lies with him," the Prime Minister said.

Asked if he had accepted Dr Ling's resignation, the Prime Minister said: "I haven't accepted yet but I will have to consider."

He was speaking to reporters after launching the MEC dealers' convention here.

Asked about Dr Ling's reasons for resigning, he said the MCA president felt the party would be stronger with his departure and entry of new and young blood.

Dr Mahathir said Dr Ling had indicated to him that he had wanted to resign from the Cabinet.

"I tried to stop him. I wanted him to continue. He has done a good job of promoting our ports. As you know, he has been visiting the ports and meeting the shipping lines owners etc, etc ... and he has been very successful. The ports have achieved a 200 per cent growth since he started handling them himself.

"So he is a good Minister. I would be sorry to lose him but then I cannot stop him if he is determined to do so, if that is in the interest of his party," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked when he would be meeting Dr Ling, he said it should have been today but he (Dr Mahathir) was unable to see him.

On whether there were other reasons for Dr Ling's resignation, Dr Mahathir said: "He thinks he has been there for a long time, according to him, and should step down.

"He thinks it is in the best interest of the party. His party as well as the Barisan Nasional."

Asked if he was comfortable with the idea of a BN component party leader not being represented in the Cabinet, he said:

"I don't know the details, if he will still be party president. I will talk to him to get the details.

"If that is the case, there is nothing we can do. We have to make do. Life must go on."

Asked about Dr Ling's resignation coming in the wake of the MCA's help in ensuring an "overwhelming victory" for the BN in the recent general election and the fact that no extra government positions were given to the MCA in reward, Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman, said:

"I don't know about rewards but I think we have given the MCA the proper treatment.

"It is not just the question of rewards. We recognise the role of the MCA. I don't think we can start shuffling around the proportion because once you do that, we will have a lot of problems with the others."

On whether there would be a major Cabinet reshuffle, the Prime Minister said he had not even thought about it.

"Big, small. I don't know. What is the size of a reshuffle?" he asked.

Asked if the episode would destabilise the BN, Dr Mahathir said it took a lot to destabilise the coalition, adding that even with the foreign media running down the BN, it still won the general election with

"a three-quarter majority".

"They can campaign and help the Opposition but we will still win."
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