

Ling ready to leave

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Transport minister submitted undated resignation letter to PM last August

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KUALA LUMPUR: Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik confirmed yesterday what had been widely rumoured several months ago that he had submitted an undated resignation letter to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said Mahathir mentioned this letter submitted on Aug 15 last year during the course of the Barisan Nasional Supreme Council meeting yesterday and that he had yet to make a decision.

"I leave it to the prime minister to decide whenever he says go. He knows, I am very happy," he said after Mahathir's press conference at the end of the supreme council meeting.

Mahathir, who is also BN chairman, made no mention of the resignation letter when he spoke to reporters.

Asked why he wanted to resign as a cabinet minister, Ling, 60, said he had announced his intention to step down from the cabinet on May 22, 2000, but was advised against it by the prime minister. Party members also wanted him to stay.

On their advice, he took two weeks' leave to think over his intention. When he came back, he said he would continue to serve as transport minister, a post he has held for 14 years.

Ling, who is MCA president, said he is mentally prepared to leave anytime now and has no regret about it since he has completed a big part of his agenda with the official launch of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (Utar) on Aug 13 last year.

"There is no perfect time for resigning but I looked at my agenda. With Utar, I think I have completed a very large part, if not all of my agenda and I don't think I can do much more.

MCA will decide party position, says Ling

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"As long as I'm around, of course, we will do everything possible to help but my agenda is complete. It is time for others, the younger ones, to take over."

On whether he was leaving because of pending court cases, he said: "I've cleared all my court cases. They're all lies."

On his political career, he said: "I have always been very grateful to the prime minister, BN and MCA for having given me the chance to serve for many years in important positions. It's only with gratitude that when the time comes to leave, I'll be happy to go."

As to his successor, he said it is MCA's internal problem and will be discussed within the party. The central committee meets tomorrow.

Ling said the resignation letter is for his ministerial post and it is up to MCA to decide on his party post.

On his retirement, he said: "One thing's for sure, I'm not going back to medical service ... I've forgotten the names of medicines."

Ling, a medical graduate from the University of Singapore, quit his practice in 1975 to be actively involved in politics, starting as the Member of Parliament for Mata Kuching in Penang in 1974.

In 1976, he was appointed parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Local Government and Federal Territory and more than a year later, transferred to the Information Ministry and in 1982 to the Finance Ministry, holding the same post.

On March 28, 1984, he resigned as deputy finance minister following his expulsion from the MCA after a leadership crisis. He was among the 14 party stalwarts led by Tan Koon Swan.

Ling was reinstated on Feb 18, 1985 and appointed deputy education minister and a year later appointed transport minister.

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