

PM decides Ling's fate

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PUTRAJAYA: The prime minister will decide when Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik's resignation will take effect.

"I have not agreed to it and I haven't made a decision. It is up to me. I will decide when is the right time for him to go," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

However, he said that Ling's resignation will not "mess up the cabinet" (see Page 8).

He said Ling gave the letter earlier, but it was he (Mahathir) who did not let him go.

However, *Bernama* reported that Ling had insisted on quitting the cabinet at the Barisan Nasional (BN) Supreme Council meeting on Tuesday.

The news agency, quoting a source who attended the meeting, said Mahathir informed the meeting of the undated letter he received last August.

"The prime minister asked Dr Ling to reconsider his decision (to resign) but Dr Ling insisted during the meeting (to step down).

"That's all I can reveal to you at the moment, let's see tomorrow what will happen," the agency quoted the source as saying.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Sri Abdullah

Ahmad Badawi said Ling's resignation was discussed at the cabinet meeting yesterday.

"The PM was not pressured by anyone to announce Ling's letter at the BN meeting. He made the announcement voluntarily because he does not want to see any problems arising in MCA," he told a press conference after an Umno management committee meeting.

Asked what Umno thinks of Ling's intended resignation, Abdullah said: "It is not something weird. It is up to Ling. If he is not there, other leaders will replace him."

Ling, at a separate press conference earlier, maintained that he will continue as MCA president until his term expires in 2005, although he plans to leave the cabinet.

"Party posts cannot be relinquished just like that as I have to discuss with colleagues and the succession plan has to be put in place."

Asked why he had made the announcement on Tuesday when Mahathir had not touched on the issue, Ling said the prime minister explained to RN leaders why he had submitted his resignation.

"Since the prime minister mentioned it in the meeting, I gave more details," he said.