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PM: I'll make decision on Ling at appropriate time

Firdaus Abdullah

PUTRAJAYA, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will make a decision on Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik's resignation as Transport Minister at an "appropriate time" as it is an important matter.

"I will make a decision when it suits my time, (it's) the Government's interests. I'm not talking about Liong Sik (specifically), but replacing a minister in a very important position is very difficult, so I'll have to think very carefully."

He was replying to questions on when he would decide on the MCA president's undated letter of resignation sent to him on Aug 15.

This is the second time that Dr Ling had voiced his intention to resign from his Cabinet post.

Dr Mahathir also dismissed rumours that there were already candidates nominated for the Transport Minister's post.

"No, no candidates yet," he said after meeting 84 scouts from the United Kingdom today.

On Tuesday, Dr Ling announced that he had submitted an undated resignation letter to Dr Mahathir last year, and was ready to vacate his Cabinet post any time.

A day later, Dr Mahathir confirmed receiving Dr Ling's resignation letter, but said he was not prepared to allow the MCA president to vacate his post yet.

Asked about his meeting with British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw yesterday, Dr Mahathir said he had informed Straw that his Government should be more specific in issuing travel advisories, and not generalise the situation in Southeast Asia.

He also expressed Kuala Lumpur's satisfaction that Britain shared the general opinion that any action pertaining to Iraq must be done through the United Nations.

"Well they (Britain) have said that they hope there would not be a war and they think that it should be something that the UN should decide. They also think that perhaps they could influence the US.

"I think there is a 50-50 chance now to avoid war; it was uncertain before but it is less uncertain now. I'm hoping that some miracle will happen that will stop a war," he said.

The Prime Minister was also asked about his meeting with Japanese Finance Minister Masajuro Shiokawa at his office today.

He said Japan wanted to work closely with Malaysia and was ready to extend assistance although Malaysia could no longer enjoy the special privileges accorded to developing nations.

"Although they say Malaysia is not a developing country as we have progressed so far ahead, and therefore cannot get the kind of soft loans we used to get, they will still consider helping Malaysia."

Malaysia prefers to source for Japanese funds as they are far more attractive and cheaper than the financial market.

"We are financing a lot of our infrastructure projects with Japanese loans because their loans are very attractive, otherwise we may have to raise loans from the market and that will be very costly.

"So, if we can get cheaper loans we will try," he said.

Shiokawa, who is chairman of the Japan-Malaysia Association in Japan, will meet Japanese business leaders in Malaysia.

Japan and Malaysia are significant trading partners, with Tokyo among

Malaysia's top export markets.

Malaysia's exports to Japan in October last year amounted to RM4.3 billion, while imports from Japan during the same period amounted to RM4.9 billion.

Shiokawa said after meeting Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi that Malaysia and Japan were discussing the creation of an Asian bond market.

"We try to push the idea forward," Shiokawa said.

They also discussed the Asean Plus Three, Look East Policy and Vision 2020.

Shiokawa invited Abdullah to visit Japan.