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PM: It's my prerogative (HL)

Firdaus Abdullah; Aionon Mohd; Patrick Sennyah

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today confirmed that he had received a resignation letter from Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, but has not yet accepted it.

Explaining that he received the undated resignation letter "a long time ago", he said it was his prerogative to decide even though Dr Ling had clearly stated his intention to vacate his government position.

"I received his letter a long time ago but I've not yet agreed to his resignation," Dr Mahathir said at the Putrajaya Lake Club after watching a demonstration of a rescue hovercraft manufactured by AF Dot Engineering Sdn Bhd (see Page 5).

Asked if Dr Ling's second announcement of his intention to resign had undermined the Cabinet, Dr Mahathir said this was not the case.

"He has given me his resignation letter which states his intention very clearly, but it is I who have not let him resign yet. It's my prerogative, so there is no such thing as undermining the Cabinet," Dr Mahathir said.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said it was Dr Ling's right to make his own decision on whether to resign, retire or withdraw from politics.

"It is a decision he has made, and when he is no longer around, surely there are others to take over," Abdullah said after chairing the Umno management meeting here today.

Asked if Umno would appeal to Dr Ling to reconsider, Abdullah said: "Why should we do that? That is the prerogative of the Prime Minister. His resignation will not affect the Government as his decision was not a result of a crisis in the Government. It is not as if he disagreed with his responsibilities or policies for his portfolio. It is all related to his party."

Dr Ling announced yesterday that he had submitted his letter to the Prime Minister on Aug 15 last year, to take effect on a date to be fixed by Dr Mahathir if the resignation were accepted.

"I tried to resign on May 22, 2000 but was unsuccessful," said Dr Ling. "After that, Dr Mahathir asked me when I would like to go and I told him after I completed my agenda, which was to launch Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman on Aug 13 last year.

"On Aug 15, I gave Dr Mahathir my resignation letter," he said today.

Asked if he had decided whom to recommend to the Prime Minister as the next Transport Minister, Dr Ling said the MCA would decide when the time comes.

He said he had not decided on his party position, and would discuss the matter with his colleagues.

"I cannot let go of my party president's post just like that. There are many issues involved, especially that of succession, which must be discussed in detail first. My term is until 2005 and I have not thought about it yet," he said.

On the factionalism within the MCA, Dr Ling said things had simmered down and there was now less bickering.

He declined to reveal his future plans for the party. "There may still be people out there who do not want to see me succeed so it is best I carry out any plans quietly and carefully."