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`Appointment as First Finance Minister gazetted'

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday his appointment as First Finance Minister had been gazetted and, in any case, any Cabinet Minister was empowered to table the Budget in the Dewan Rakyat.

After tabling the 1999 Budget, he made this clarification to reporters after Karpal Singh (DAP-Jelutong) claimed in Parliament that the appointment of Dr Mahathir and removal of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as Finance Minister were not gazetted.

Dr Mahathir said the removal was gazetted under the Ministerial Functions Act 1969 (Federal Ministers Order 1998).

This was issued on the order of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong on Sept 5 and signed by the Chief Secretary to the Government.

"Thus there is no basis to Karpal's claim that I am not empowered to speak," Dr Mahathir said.

Earlier, Karpal came under fire from Government backbenchers minutes before the 1999 Budget was tabled at the Dewan Rakyat.

The brief shouting and exchange of abuse forced Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail to order Karpal to withdraw "unparliamentary" words which he had used twice.

As soon as the doa was recited, Karpal stood up and raised a point of order, saying that only a Finance Minister whose appointment had been accepted by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar and subsequently gazetted, could table the Budget.

Karpal asked whether the position of Anwar as Finance Minister had been revoked by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong according to the Federal Constitution after he was sacked by the Prime Minister.

He claimed that if the Yang di-Pertuan Agong had not formally revoked Anwar's position as Finance Minister and as the latter did not resign, Anwar was still the Finance Minister.

He claimed that if that was the case, only Anwar could table the Budget.

At this point, several BN backbenchers took part in a shouting match with Karpal, who then said the BN MPs were behaving like "binatang" (animals).

Zahir then ordered Karpal to withdraw the word as it was "unparliamentary" and was against the Standing Order.

Karpal withdrew the word but continued to ask Dr Mahathir whether Anwar's finance ministerial position had been revoked by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong on the Prime Minister's advice.

Just as Dr Mahathir stood up to answer his question, Karpal and BN MPs got engaged in a heated exchange of words.

Karpal then used the word "bodoh" (stupid) on the BN MPs. This prompted Datuk Shukri Mohamed (BN-Machang) to ask the Speaker to order Karpal to withdraw the word.

Karpal stood up and said: "I withdraw the word, Speaker, but replace it with "tidak berapa pandai" (not very clever)". Dr Mahathir told the House that he had informed the Yang di-Pertuan Agong of his decision to sack Anwar as Finance Minister.

"That was an advice to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. But I don't know whether the Member of the House (Karpal) considers this an advice."

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