

Daim dismisses speculation of rift with Mahathir

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FINANCE Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin, dismissing speculation of a rift with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said he is loyal to Dr Mahathir and they both worked in getting what was best for the nation.

Daim, in a rare interview with *Mingguan Malaysia*, said he had never submitted a resignation letter to the Prime Minister.

"I agreed to join the Government for one purpose and that is to help revive the economy and then be allowed to leave. The PM agreed and when that happens is between me and him," he said.

Daim said persistent talk of a rift and of his quitting was fuelled by certain quarters within and outside the country who did not understand his relationship with the Prime Minister.

"Even if I do retire, what is wrong? We have capable replacements," he added, without saying when that would be.

Talk of a split between Dr Mahathir and Daim has resurfaced regularly despite their periodic assurances that all is well.

Speculation that Daim could be leaving the Cabinet soon, depriving the Government of the man who has

led efforts to pull Malaysia out of its worst recession in more than four decades, has pushed down share prices on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange.

"The market has nothing to do with me. Earlier they said the general elections and then CLOB, followed by re-entry of Morgan Stanley index. Everything's over, but the market still fell," he said.

He said what was important for the market was the economic recovery and

whether companies were profitable or not.

But Daim, who was named finance minister in 1998 after Dr Mahathir sacked his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, said people would still find excuses and be influenced by local analysts who tended to repeat what foreign analysts say.

Daim said the nation's bank merger plan last year and the appointment of a new central Bank Negara governor did not create problems between him and the prime minister.

"It wasn't a question of my candidate or the PM's candidate. A lot of names were mentioned and we chose the best after considering several factors," Daim said.

Datuk Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz was appointed Bank Negara governor on May 1, replacing Datuk Ali Abul Hassan Sulaiman.

Daim said he owned a small bank, International Bank of Malaysia, which was sold before the merger plan took off.

He said he was not born to be a politician and would like to step down from party posts once he quit the Cabinet. — Reuters